# THE MOUNTAIN OF JADE

IRWIN *and* STEFANSSON

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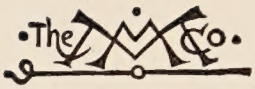
# THE MOUNTAIN OF JADE

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# THE MOUNTAIN OF JADE

BY

VIOLET IRWIN

AND

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*Authors of*
*"Kak, the Copper Eskimo," and*
*"The Shaman's Revenge"*

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TO THE RAIKES FAMILY

IN ADMIRATION

171468

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# THE MOUNTAIN OF JADE

# CHAPTER I

## A WHALE AT CLOSE QUARTERS

IT was midnight. Hot sunshine streamed across the ice, turning both snow and water into one blinding dazzle. The Arctic sky had been cloudless for a week. The world had been scintillating continuously for a hundred and sixty-eight hours. Nowhere in all the vast white field was there any rest from the blinding monotony except where the whale hunters had raised a windbreak or temporary shelter.

The whole village was on the ice with a dozen umiaks—the native skin boats made by stretching seal or walrus hides over a wooden frame. Knots of men and single figures were strung along the edge of the lead, all looking for whales. Half of these watchers could not tell whether the distant figures were members of their party or great black spots floating before their strained eyes.

The glare beat down upon them. It rose up

against them. It penetrated their tents while they rested. It pierced their eyes like sharp needles as they watched the blazing path of the sun. The relentless daylight of spring is more dreaded by the people of the North than the relentless night of winter.

The wise among the natives watched through the annoyingly narrow field of vision afforded by their protective spectacles—slit pieces of wood or deer hoof bound on over the eyes. The careless watched through tears. Two men in the throes of snow blindness had wrapped their heads with the skin of a white bear killed the day before and lay in an agony close under the shadow of a large umiak.

A quarter of a mile from that spot a couple of figures were examining some strange gear. Three air-inflated sealskin poks, attached to a harpoon line, rested lightly on the ice. They had been deposited there by the trader at Point Barrow, who had conceived the idea of taking a moving picture of whaling in the old fashion, a much more picturesque hunt than the modern way of shooting the monster with an explosive charge from a shoulder gun.

The smaller of the two youths stirred one of the air bags with his foot. It moved uneasily, like a live thing. They laughed. How funny the skins must look bobbing along behind the antics of a frenzied whale! The old contrivance was clumsy, but there seemed no trick about its use. One threw the harpoon by hand. Each pok had a buoyancy of about three hundred pounds, so together they

offered nine hundred pounds' resistance to the mammal's plunging.

The other visitor hefted the harpoon in his hand and approved it. "Good. Well balanced. If some old bowhead would just come along now, eh! Zip!" He made a gesture of throwing, and returned the weapon carefully to its place.

"Might as well take our watch here," his companion suggested.

They squatted on the ice, facing seaward. From their low position the lead looked almost like the open ocean, for the strong current had carried the ice off shore.

"If we don't get a whale in this stretch I guess we don't get one at all," the native said, gazing under his hand at a light fog obscuring the horizon.

"Say, where is all that ice gone to—is it melted?" the stranger asked.

"Melted!" Kak, the Eskimo, gave a loud laugh, which he instantly swallowed. Whales are nervous and have quick hearing. It behooves men to keep silent on the watch. "Melted—the pack melted at this time of year! No, indeed! It has just moved out from shore for a bit. It will be back—crowding down on us. Looks to me as if it were coming back already, though the wind is off shore. Don't you see a white line over there?"

"I sure do." The smaller man gazed under his hand.

From feet to neck they were exactly alike, these two, wearing the same cut of sealskin boots, fur trousers, fur smocks. The same wolf-trimmed hoods

were thrown back—but there the likeness ended. The shock of the native's brownish black hair was a stern contrast to his companion's tawny curls. The white man was tanned nearly as dark as the Eskimo, but he was plumper, finer boned, not trained down to anything like as good condition. At a casual glance their loose fur garments hid such differences. Both were feeling jolly and comfortable. They had slept well. They had dined well, off bear steak and blubber, and both were armored with amber-colored goggles that rendered them immune to the daylight's fiery flame.

Kak and Gerry Raikes, the ex-sailor, had discovered each other only a short time before, and were still in that experimental state when juxtaposition warms to intimacy. They still pitted themselves against each other at every turn, consciously or subconsciously, each one trying to measure the other by the yardstick of his own ability.

Kak held the advantage, for he knew every rule of the game, every card likely to be played by Nature, or the hunter, or the hunted. Gerry, on the other hand, was raw. The unadvertised features of the North were continually springing surprises on him. This "midnight sun," for instance. Nobody had ever predicted the strain of it—this life on the ice. Actually living on the frozen roof of the sea—it held a man's heart in his mouth! The giddy way the ice had of suddenly cracking and moving off from the shore strip, carrying the unwary hunter with it. Nobody had ever warned him about that. More than once on this trip the hollow sound

of breaking ice had boomed between the hunters and the shore. The party had been obliged to assemble quickly, mount their clumsy umiak on a dog sled, and race the team miles back to safety. Miles over rough, high ridges, as like as not, where the floes had jammed and frozen.

He had seen the ice come down—"crowding in." That was a good phrase for it. When the pack began to move nothing could resist its force. All the powers of the North seemed to get behind and shove, piling the outer pack onto the land floe, rearing great cakes on end, thrusting them over each other, and letting them slide back with the peculiar nerve-wrenching shriek of a lead pencil on a slate, but loud enough to be heard for miles. Imagine infant gods at play with ice blocks big as houses, tumbling them about, building them into forts and knocking their forts over.

Kak said the pack was coming down now—and he knew. Gerry regarded the white line shoving out of the fog with much the same awe as he regarded the youth beside him, trained to meet Nature's grimmest moods. But he did not show the feeling. Rather he sought to impress his own supremacy.

The two boys were subconsciously pitted against each other as they sat side by side gazing seaward under their hands. This time the honors went to Gerry. The Eskimo's sight was keen, but nothing can search water like a sailor's eye.

"By Davy Jones, what's that?" cried the white man, pointing to a thin stem that showed momen-

tarily against the haze; so faint it was it might have been an exclamation mark written in white ink on white paper.

"Where?"

Kak stood up for a better view, and took one long look.

"By jinks!"

He wheeled suddenly, cupped his hands at his mouth, and bellowed: "She blows! She blows! Yai! She blows!"

The wind, which was stiffening, whisked his cry away, but his position, the long sweep of his right arm pointing to where the waterspout had played, carried his message. Instantly the camp sprang alive. Men ran from all directions. The ache of inflamed eyes was forgotten. The two natives lying by the umiak roused themselves and laid ready hands on the gunwale. Every ounce of strength counted in lifting the boat silently into the water, without scraping it over the ice.

"The critter's far enough away. They can make all the noise they like. We don't need to worry; they'll come by here and pick us up. Watch 'em work," said Kak in a patronizing manner. Gerry might be the longer sighted, but Kak was determined to show himself the cooler. It was an easy victory, for the white man wasn't cool at all.

Gerry realized he was about to launch on a terrific exploit. To thrust yourself into a boat and go out and do battle with your first whale—it is a moment. The youth's face had gone pale beneath the tan, then red. Under his yellow hair glinting

in the sunshine, it looked like a richly red tomato in a golden bowl. He wore a revolver strapped around his waist, nobody quite knew why, and his hand instinctively sought this—not with any definite idea of shooting the monster but as a threatened man's hand will. Gerry's eyes were almost popping out of his head and his mouth stood slightly ajar.

Kak, observing, smiled, and added a touch to his own nonchalance. He stooped to reach for the old harpoon lying alongside the air poks, saying:

"If this camera man doesn't show up he's going to miss his chance."

On that word he was erect again, his eyes leveled at the umiak, for he was secretly torn with anxiety over their slowness. A queer little squawk made him swing about to look at Gerry. His glance traveled past his friend to the lead, and he had to ram his mittened hand into his mouth to stop a yell.

Directly in front of him, not sixty feet away, a great black side curved and glistened, showed for a moment like an island miraged in the water, and then vanished.

A whale! A whale not sixty feet away! "Gad, if they scare him!" was Kak's first thought. His ears quivered with the fear of hearing noise from the umiak. His brain nearly burst from the effort of his will striving against such a calamity, seeking to spread a warning to his mates and Gerry by psychic emanation, as a glowworm sheds its light

To speak, to move, was an impossibility. He dare not breathe. Never again would he have such a chance to spear a whale at close quarters. If only the creature had not been frightened, if only it would rise a second time.

Very slowly, cautiously, without a whisper of sound, Kak raised the spear and waited, poised. There came no sound from down the lead. Evidently the men had seen the creature. They, too, waited as if frozen—a sculptured group of Eskimos straining to launch a umiak.

The tension was more than Gerry could bear. He shifted from one foot to the other. It was not a crunch exactly, that sound, yet Kak's nerves tightened. Through his mind flashed the thought: "This is the final measure—the test. If he breaks now he's no good." And more vaguely, in the wings of his fancy, as it were: "If he loses me this whale, I'll kill him."

They waited, immobile. Waited. The sun beat down its midnight rays. The wind fled by. The water lipped the ice edge. Steadily the pack was closing in from the northeast. They waited. It seemed impossible for human flesh to stand the strain a moment longer. Then out of the ocean a solid wall of the world seemed to rise before the hunter's face. A column of spray hissed into the blue dome of the sky. A man's arm shot forward. A steel point flashed. The harpoon found no space to describe a curve. Its slender shaft sped straight; its biting point sank deep into the mass of flesh.

There was a sudden roar. The geyser of steam

and crystal drops sprang twice as high and fell in a rainstorm on the waters of the lead.

"Argverktunga, kaisits!" bellowed Kak. "Come here, everybody, I've caught a whale!—Bring the boat! Bring the boat!"

Words could not form fast enough in his whirling wits, so he opened his mouth and let his lungs explode in sound.

Things began to happen all together. Gerry had galvanized himself and started toward the camp on the run, with a vague idea of bringing the boat. His short legs in their short fur pants twinkled comically over the ice, while his midnight shadow danced a wild fandango alongside.

The umiak was already in the water and the crew had scrambled aboard. But fast as they all moved the whale moved faster.

There was a terrific leap, followed by a flagellation of the surface of the lead. Water overflowed the ice, surging knee deep. A gigantic body bounded into the air. A huge tail flung back, smacking the floe a few feet from where Kak stood, smashing it utterly. Great rays shot out across that eighteen-inch thickness, like cracks across the surface of a mirror.

Kak was flung violently onto his face. Darkness and glittering stars obscured the glittering day. He lay prone a moment, then the stars melted into sunflash. He was himself again, but wallowing on the wet ice, slipping, sliding. Presently he recovered his balance and knelt up to take his bearings.

The brisk wind had at once separated the pieces

of ice broken by the astonishing force of the whale's attack. Kak was afloat on a small cake, and the waves whipped up by the monster's fight were rocking it like a cradle. The lead was empty. The umiak lay to, at a safe distance, its crew speechless with surprise.

Of all the actors in that frightful climax only Gerry moved. Too late to be taken aboard the umiak, he came running back now, straight up the long point between a couple of deep cracks. Kak saw that he was in danger of going adrift also, and called warning. But before he could make the white man understand, the triangle of ice had cracked across its base and the cake was moving out.

No actual peril threatened the youths unless the whale chose to come up again and offer resistance at close quarters. Apparently he had plunged straight down, for the triple float had vanished where it first struck the water near the floe. Current and wind had seized the débris of broken ice and were driving it out quickly, while the pack seemed to be steadily closing in from the opposite direction. Eventually the ice rafts would be caught against its side. However, long before that occurred, the umiak would have come around and picked up the boys.

The lane of water between Gerry and Kak widened perceptibly, but nobody paid it any attention. Kak's heart rioted with disappointment as he watched old Tannaumirk standing in the bow of the boat, his gun ready at his shoulder to take the one shot which, well placed, would kill the prize.

The whale rose and spouted at a safe distance. This time tragedy painted itself on the blue in a wonderful rose-colored spray, as if some whimsical muse had tinctured the whole ocean with red bath salts. The mammal's lifeblood rocketed and showered back, proving the truth of that ugly wound in its bulbous head.

A sharp report rang out. The whale gave a second terrifying leap and pounded the ocean in its death agony. The waters were thrashed into foam. The sea flowed away from that agitated center in circular billows, ever widening. One after another they lifted the umiak lightly; they teetered the ice cakes.

Suddenly all was over. The dark giant floated in the center of the scene with the three silly air poks, blown quickly before the wind, lodged against its side. Kak crossed his arms on his chest to crush his bitter envy down and stood like a Stoic watching his mates row out and secure *his* quarry.

## CHAPTER II

### FLOATING ICE

HAVING secured their whale, the hunters' next job was to tow it to the ice and cut it up. With critical eyes Kak watched them make fast to the carcass. The working party was not half a mile away, clearly outlined in the dazzling light against a dull white curtain. By and by the watcher became aware of that white background. Evidently the fog was closing in. It already hid the edge of the pack.

Kak did not like the prospect any too well. As the whale and poks were sailing out before the wind, it behooved the crew to take them to the ice at once before picking up their companions. While this was going on the ice rafts would be drifting out, maybe passing from bright sunshine into clammy cold. Suddenly Kak remembered Gerry. He looked around and for the first time noticed the widening gap between them. Gerry's larger cake was traveling slower than his and at a different angle. It lay well away to the northeast.

Gerry had once bragged that he liked experience —new experience—but that in civilization adventure was so hedged with safety it lost most of its kick. Kak smiled. Wandering around the Arctic

Sea on a shelf of ice was certainly new and might be enjoyed so long as a serviceable boat lingered in sight. But the North holds many surprises in its bag of tricks. Possibly the stranger was in for a real thrill.

The umiak had already reached camp and its crew were busy lashing their prize to the ice. Cutting up a whale is at best a long job, and they would be short-handed, for some of the men must return in the boat to rescue the marooned youths.

Kak saw they were coming toward him. He wished they had gone for Gerry first. His glance darted again to the white man. The fury of the sunshine seemed to have faded a little in that direction. The sparkling water was pleasantly clouded. Jiminy! How quickly the fog was rolling up. He took off his glasses and looked again to be sure. The first faint curtain of haze hung between him and the sailor. Kak grew uneasy. If the umiak did not make short work of the trip Gerry might be lost.

The men on shore were working energetically, with bodies bent over the carcass and great knives and axes hacking away. Their faces might as well have been buried in the blubber for all they saw. That pale breath of vapor, dimming the gorgeous day, lay on them also. It was very confusing. It lent an illusion of distance.

Moment by moment the fog thickened. Presently the camp faded out. The umiak vanished. Gerry was nowhere to be seen. Kak's world was the ice cake floating on a pond of water limited by

a blank wall rising unbroken all around him and closing over his head like the inside of a snow house.

He hallooed. The crew answered, muffled by fog and far away. Kak hallooed and hallooed. The Eskimos' voices came from closer at hand, and very soon the umiak's prow pushed through his prison wall.

With an anxious "Can you find the white man?" Kak sprang aboard. A moment later the ice cake vanished. The world was again blank as a snow dome, only now the boat and its crew occupied center stage.

Nothing is more baffling than the dead whiteness of sea fog, unless it be the dead whiteness of a blizzard.

"Turn around," said Kak, standing just as he had landed in the umiak and pointing. "Gerry disappeared in that direction."

"No. He is on the other side," Tannaumirk answered. "The boat has turned. We had our paddles ready to head for camp the minute your foot touched."

"Camp!" His one syllable was sharp, alarmed, demanding. "Why camp?"

"It is little use groping for the stranger in this smother."

"Best to return and work until the fog lifts."

"If we find camp we'll be lucky!"

"It is not as if the stranger were drifting to the open sea—the pack will stop him."

Every voice was for deserting Gerry, but that was not Kak's way. He had been so much among

white men that he had learned to look at things from their point of view. Gerry's very helplessness made him their charge. The stranger knew little of the North. Under such dire new circumstances he could not intelligently measure his safety or his danger. If left to float for hours alone, uncheered by human voice or any reassurance that he was not abandoned, it might go hard with him. Kak had seen white men of iron spirit who could put their heads into death's jaws without a quiver. But he had also known white men whose nerves seemed to be strung on sinew, dancing and jigging all over the place at the first hint of real disaster.

The little sailor with his quips and jests, his lively blue eyes and ever-smiling mouth, seemed too utterly jolly for the wear and tear of heavy tragedy. A man does not use an air pok as an anchor, Kak reasoned. Each has its value, but neither is serviceable in the other's place. So far the Eskimo liked Gerry, but he had no illusions about him. He was obsessed now by a horrid vision of the Kabluna gone to pieces, lying on the ice, sapped of courage and resistance—useless as an opened air bag.

Something inside Kak rejected the idea fiercely. He did not want that to happen. His indignation turned against his mates, and he snapped out: "We stay right here till we find him."

Old Tannaumirk would not give in, and the men backed him up. Kak raged. The argument lengthened. Emotion ran the gamut in the Eskimo manner with personal sarcasm and pointed jokes. And

all the while they paddled to and fro, aimlessly, without a notion of where they were heading. They called and called but got no answer.

Time passed. Kak was in despair, the crew sulky. All were hungry and cold, for the heavy moisture had effectually closed out the sun. The others blamed Kak for their inability to find camp. By and by they grew too tired to argue. Quietness and gloom settled on them. Only the dip, dip of the paddles and a discouraged halloo, once in a while, broke the silence.

"Ha! The mist thins!" Tannaumirk exclaimed suddenly. "What did I tell you? No fog could last against this wind."

It was so. The pond on which they floated had widened to a lake. They could see ice cakes here and there. The blurred glow of the sun, now high in the heavens, gave them a bearing. They headed northeast at Kak's direction. Steadily the haze dissolved. There was no longer need to challenge emptiness with calls. The lookout passed them word that a large ice raft lay directly ahead.

Kak's heart failed at the first glance. This could not be Gerry's raft—no life showed on it. He stood up and searched the white field intently with bare vision. Seeing was not easy, for fog still rolled in the higher air levels, obscuring the sun, and every white form was filmed gray.

"Look! There!" One of the crew pointed to a small dark object in the middle of the ice cake.

"Too small for a man," the rest objected. "It must be a fox."

On an off chance somebody called, but the wind whisked the sound away. They bent to their paddles.

Suddenly Kak gave a great laugh. "It's the Kabluna's legs!" he cried. Admiration gushed in him. He perceived the rest of the white man's body was obscured behind a windbreak and knew he had misjudged him. Gerry was no hysterical weakling, but a regular person—one who met obstacles with common sense. Kak had "fallen for Gerry" from the start, but he could not love where he did not respect. Now a door in his heart opened and he took the stranger in.

Subsequent events increased his pleased surprise. They made a silent landing and crept up on the sailor. There he sat behind the windbreak whistling a chantey with his gun in his hand.

They pounced on him swiftly, laughing heartily, for Eskimos appreciate practical joking.

"What's the big idea?" asked Kak. "What were you going to shoot?"

"Reckoned I'd touch the pack in time and thought I might pick off a bear—food and bedding, what? And maybe a fire if I could have managed to burn some fat."

Kak translated to the crew. The Eskimos exchanged glances heavy with hunting lore. So he would tackle a bear single-handed. He was all right, this fellow. They eyed him sympathetically.

Gerry put his revolver back in its holster with a swagger. It had companioned him through the dismal hours and fortified his courage. None of

the natives guessed that his bear story was a bluff, that for the last hour he had given up hope. Gerry was like that—spirits at zero and a joke on his lips. He had thought death by freezing or death by starvation faced him. Never! If the worst came to the worst he saw his blunt-nosed friend as a way out. He had imagined himself doing it, just there as he was, with the windbreak standing up for a headstone. Fancy always ran away with Gerry, but not even Kak knew him well enough to fathom its grim depths.

The sailor gave a good account of himself with a paddle going back to camp; and he did pretty well, for a novice, when they all turned in on the job of cutting whale.

Gerry felt weak with hunger; still, he knew better than to make a moan about it. These Eskimos could go so long between meals! They just worked on till the job was done and then ate. Even the men on the floe had not breakfasted. Seeing their companions were so long away one of them had stopped to put a pot over the rude blubber stove (made out of a five-gallon kerosene tin), had melted snow to water, and thrown in chunks of bear meat; for it is the natives' custom to have food cooked against any party's return. When the stew was ready the pot had been lifted off and set on one side, snugly wrapped in skins. But in spite of their care the food had cooled, so now it was put on again, and the fire, which in such a stove burns fiercely and with an amazing volume of black smoke, soon warmed it through. Gerry would have liked

it hotter, but Eskimos do not eat anything in a state that we would call thoroughly hot.

As soon as that savory odor reached their nostrils the men recognized their pangs for what they were, and word was passed to stop cutting.

They gathered around—a dozen hungry, hearty, laughing fellows. The story of Gerry's bear that he was going to slaughter out there on the pack and make into an overcoat had to be told. Kak's pride rose for his friend as the crew thumped applause on his back. Tannaumirk had just dished up the first wooden bowl full of stew, and handed it to the hero, when a soft jar ran through the ice floor of their shelter and a grinding noise made the whalers leap to their feet.

"The pack! The pack! We're against the pack!"

"We've come down on the pack!"

A babble of voices broke out. The crew, discarding their empty plates, sprang up and ran for the umiak. They hauled it from the water and began lashing it onto the sled. The famished sailor had just gulped one blessed mouthful when Kak called him:

"Lend a hand!"

Gerry parted with his food reluctantly. "What's wrong?" he yelled into Kak's ear above the noise and excitement.

"Here's your grand chance to go out and kill that bear!" his mate answered, pulling thongs as he talked. "I was wrong when I said, hours ago, the pack was coming in. We must have broken off from the shore before that, and our floe was sailing out.

All the time our fellows were occupied cutting up the whale, while that blanket of fog obscured the pack, we've been drifting. We're probably as far from shore now as that thin line of white was from us before the infernal whale started to blow—maybe we're farther. The pack is likely moving out, too, slower than our floe, but steadily. It's going to be a race for life whether we can get across before the channel on the other side widens too much."

"But—we have the boat," said Gerry.

"Yes. And the dickens of a head wind! You've never tried to manage a umiak against a head wind!"

"And with a heavy load." The sailor turned thoughtful.

"Load, nothing! We'll have to leave the whale right where it lies. Do you suppose we're going to drag a loaded boat across the ice when our lives are in danger?"

"Three thousand dollars worth of bone!" Gerry whistled. He began to see the enormity of their predicament.

"Couldn't we make it? How far——"

"How do I know! Maybe another five miles. The break must be a long way back, for we haven't heard a sound. With this wind there'll be waves over on that side, whitecaps, broken ice, grinding ice. Oh, my merry-andrew, what a mess we're in —and everybody tired at the start!" Kak stooped to reach a lashing under the sled. "Maybe you'd better eat something," he added kindly, "but stand about. When we're ready we move off quick. And

if you're left behind there's not a man jack of us will come back after you."

Excitement entered into Gerry. Somehow his appetite had flown. How can a man be the only one to stop and eat when work faces him on all hands? With sailor knots he helped to lash the cumbersome umiak on the short sled. He harnessed himself alongside the men who were to pull through that icy trek.

Their floe was already pressing hard on the pack. Thin sheets buckled back from older, heavier ice, and fell crashing. The vibration under their feet was an uncanny thing. Sounds of heaving and scrunching came from all sides. Once started, however, the wind blowing freely in their faces soon rid them of all noise. For three miles they traveled over level going in almost complete silence. Every man was putting his last ounce of breath and energy into speed. Then they came to a pressure ridge. Here the floe had broken at some former time. The two edges had been driven together again, grinding and piling on each other, and so had frozen, forming a barrier difficult to cross. There were patches where a way must be chopped to accommodate the bulky boat. They clutched the gunwale with their hands. They lifted and hauled and lugged the umiak. When the men stumbled and fell they were almost too weary to get up. And always they had to work with that sense of breathless haste.

It was over at last. The ridge lay behind and flat ice ahead of them. Gerry breathed a sigh of

relief. What would he not have given for that discarded bowl of food! But the rest were worse off. The Eskimos had not taken even one mouthful.

A little farther on a cry of warning came from the leaders. They called a halt. It was just as Kak had foreseen. On this side of the ice whitecaps were rolling. The waves washing under the edge of the floe had heaved it up and broken it, and a stretch of loose ice cakes intersected by miniature leads lay ahead. This was a signal to unlash the umiak, put it in the water, and take the sled aboard. The water lanes were inconsiderable, the widest being maybe twenty feet, but they proved numerous, and at every one the men had to scramble into the boat and scramble out again. For the small distances across the ice islands it was not worth while remounting the umiak on the sled, so they pushed and pulled it over the ice on its flat bottom. Most of the men cussed the delay at every lead; but to Gerry's weary legs just sitting down seemed a godsend. He bellowed his relief.

"Wait," said Kak, shoring off a threatening fragment with his paddle. "This isn't the worst. Look there——" He nodded toward the open water.

Long since they had emerged from the fog belt. The sun was shining in its noontide splendor, revealing an angry line of breakers that rolled continuously along the outer edge of the last ice cake, making the wide expanse of the lead look like some evil monster licking its lips.

"What do you think of that, eh?"

Gerry grinned. Ice jams, of which he knew

nothing, made him feel sick as a helpless child, but a good glimpse of "old debil sea" roused his spirits. Kak's face remained stern. He was nervous. All the Eskimos were secretly afraid of starting out on that treacherous water. And this was not unwarranted cowardice. Sailors who frequent the oceans in our temperate zone have a margin against accident. They swim, or they seize a bit of wreckage and float, fortified by feeling that they have an even chance of being picked up. The Arctic, with its empty waters, its minimum of traffic, teaches men to fear the winds and waves that drive small vessels from their courses. Once well adrift the natives are at the mercy of their instincts. They have no scientific instruments for judging location, and may easily starve and perish on their great uncharted sea.

The white froth of water at the ice lip was not so perilous as it looked. Hidden in its smother were many floating fragments, the least of which dashed on a wooden boat would have ripped a hole in her. But the umiak was proof against such attack. It was after launching that their worst trouble began. Skin boats being so lightly constructed are particularly buoyant craft, only drawing, when laden with whaling gear, eight or ten inches of water. Their high sides act almost as sails, and this, coupled with their flat bottoms and shallow draft, makes them tremendously difficult to manage against the wind. It needed all hands to keep the course. Old Tannaumirk steered, and Kak and Gerry worked side by side in the front seat.

The full unbroken fury of the waves lashed the boat. The wind whistled in their ears. It snatched the crests from rising breakers and flung the stinging drops into their faces, as the crew strained at their labor, expending their last ounce of strength. They would sink with fatigue and rise again, paddling—paddling. All must keep at it. If the driving power faltered for a moment their keelless craft would veer and rush backward faster than it had come.

The hot sun and their physical efforts bathed them in perspiration. They were thirsty. The two who had wrapped their heads in the bearskin and lain under the umiak were practically blind now before the million facets of the dancing water throwing back brilliant light. Great tears poured down their cheeks from under their closed lids. But still they toiled at the job.

Toil—struggle. Toil of watching through the night. Toil of cutting bone from blubber. Toil of that trek across the floe. Toil at their paddles—toil, toil, toil. And all for nothing! Gerry could not forget the whalebone abandoned on the pack—from the native point of view, a fortune. He almost thought it would have been worth their while to have stayed with it, and taken the chance of drifting away west—far west.

He'd tell Kak so, some day—this was no time for talk. Their mouths remained grimly shut. Sweat trickled down their chests under their fur shirts. They bent their heads into the wind. They toiled.

All at once a cry went up. Ice ahead! No mis-

leading floating island of a few acres this, but a long straight line—the shore floe. Gradually the water became calmer. The crew, buoyed with fresh hope, put fresh vigor into their strokes. They came abreast of the ice and clutched it. At first it seemed impossible for weary backs and heavy limbs to move. Hauling the boat out of the water proved a herculean task. Their gear was lifted out first, and Gerry's round voice sang a "Heave ho!" as the bulky form slid forward. Then the men dropped where they stood and lay exhausted—but safe.

Presently old Tannaumirk sat up. Stiffly he rose to his feet and moved to the gear pile. He unpacked the stove, put on the pot, melted a chunk of last year's ice, fresh by now although it was originally as salt as the sea from which it came, and began to throw chunks of bear meat into the steaming fluid. His mates raised a faint cheer.

## CHAPTER III

### HUNTING A FATHER

"AIVUK! Aivuk!"

That call floated over the grassy plain, clear as the note of a horn.

It was hot. The sun's rays drew up residues of moisture full of earthy smells. The air piled into the sky's high arch was a wealth of soft, cool blue. Like the pelt of a piebald pony the dark tundra erupted, here and there, into patches of wild cotton plant in full white flower. A warbler poured forth from its bursting throat exuberance of rushing sap and singing life; butterflies flashed their batik wings, and insects hummed continuously.

This is the way the world looked back of Point Barrow in late June. A nebulous dark cloud floated over one spot where, amid the idyllic scene, a human form lay supine. Anybody coming up the eight- or ten-foot rise from the beach would have spied a white woolen jersey wrapped about a head encircled by a pair of arms flung across the face, and above and beyond these, the tips of two heavy seaman's boots. Gerry Raikes sprawled at full length on his back. The gentle sigh and snuffle of uncontrolled breathing showed that boredom had triumphed and the stranger slept.

"Aivuk! Walrus! Aivuk!"

The native alarm of big game at hand pierced the sailor's dreams with promise of something spirited doing. The purring snore ceased abruptly. Gerry rolled over.

"Aivuk! Aivuk! Don't you hear, you lazy dog?"

A new hail this, resonant with youth and purpose. It galvanized. The sleeper sat up suddenly, rubbing his eyes, the sleeves of his headdress dangling down comically on either side of his face. He grew unpleasantly aware of the vibrant cloud surrounding him—threw out his arms, beating it off—jumped to his feet. Gerry had fallen asleep with a fresh breeze from the ocean blowing the cursed mosquitoes away. But the instant the wind dropped they had buzzed back again—hordes of them. Half blinded, he pommeled the air. He dug the insects out of his ears and neck. He tore off the jersey and flapped it savagely in every direction.

The approaching figure was swishing and slashing about himself, in the same manner, with a willow stick. "Here," he bellowed, "don't you drive those pesky things onto me!"

"By the wooden leg of a sea cook, it's Kak!" cried Gerry, stopping his agonized antics to look. A moment later he was shaking the Eskimo by both hands.

"I told you I'd return to take you walrus hunting. And here you are sound asleep as a bear in winter, while the best herd we've seen for years is laughing at us from the ice."

"How should I know? When did you come?"

"Just now—but we're all set. Race-the-Wind has the umiak out. It's going to be a great slaughter!"

"Hurrah! Me for it!" The sailor's hand went to his trusty revolver which he always insisted on wearing.

Kak laughed and slapped him on the back. "We'll lend you a rifle. We'll make a sportsman of you yet!"

Jabbering questions and brief replies, they turned and ran to the beach.

Day after day Gerry had been hanging around, longing for Kak's return. What a life! He was bored to extinction. He had read all of Charlie Brower's books—all he wanted to read. He had heard all the stories the men told—all he wanted to hear. Point Barrow held nothing for him. His advent there had been against his will.

In Seattle, the previous summer, young Raikes had taken passage for Nome on the *Sallie Smith.* His ready cash had not quite run to the price of a ticket, but when he explained that a remittance would surely be awaiting him, the captain had allowed him to ship, with the understanding that charges would be squared at the end of the voyage.

From the little he saw of it, several things about Nome disappointed Gerry—particularly its post office. There was no money awaiting. Captain Jonas, worried by his own affairs and obliged to sail immediately, threatened by an early season, took a hostile view of the boy's mishap. He appre-

ciated Gerry's merry eye, but it is these happy-go-lucky fellows who are always dipping into other people's pockets. The youth deserved a lesson. And giving him a lesson would be convenient, too, for the crew was short-handed. Therefore Jonas told his young friend that he could work out his indebtedness by signing on as a sailor for the rest of the trading trip.

Gerry Raikes wanted to stay in Nome. He had come north seeking news, and the best place for news is reasonably where most traffic passes—Lomens' drug store in Alaska or Shepheard's Hotel in Egypt. Still, one can never tell. The thread he wanted to pick up had been broken off eighteen years before, and in eighteen years clews may spread very far. Gerry was working against time. He had until September 10th of the following year to accomplish his task. Still the northern voyage tempted him as a bit of a lark. Of course he would return to Nome in the ship in the autumn, and would then have eleven months or more to complete his search. Behind all these pros and cons lay the hard fact that he owed Jonas money. The obvious thing was to go north—he had really no choice.

With a light heart and easy conscience Gerry had signed on. Passing from Bering Strait into the Arctic Ocean gave him a thrill. Adventure was quite to his liking. He seemed to be a long way from anywhere, when he stopped to think of it, but he didn't often stop to think. The new hand proved an acquisition. He was equally gifted at singing and dancing, and could play almost any

musical instrument. Off watch the men left him little time for thought. Happily the *Sallie Smith* plowed the sea east of Barrow, east of Herschel Island, with her whole merry crew looking forward to sailing out at the end of summer.

Gerry was a gambler, the son of a gambler, but this time he gambled without the polar pack. He had not counted on its compelling white embrace, reaching down from the grim North like the arms of a witch. He had not reckoned on the possibility of a ship being squeezed close to the Arctic breast till her staves cracked and her men were spewed forth with only such gear as they could carry. All that had happened one hideous, never-to-be-forgotten night, twenty-five miles off shore, when the *Sallie Smith* was caught and sucked under between grinding floes.

Making their way over the ice to Point Barrow had not been a pleasant business. Nor did the monotonous long winter of exile add greatly to Gerry's joy. Against his natural adaptability and good nature stood the harassing thought of the neglected business in Nome, with his chance of a fortune galloping by.

Everybody knew Gerry's business. Eighteen years before his father, Cuthbert Raikes, had left an American wife and an infant son in Chicago, and gone north with the Yukon gold rush. He had never been heard of or heard from since. In time they gave him up for dead. But our hearts accept tragedy more readily than the law. Recently Cuthbert's elder brother had died in England, and seri-

ous, long-winded letters had come to Gerry setting forth the terms of his uncle's will.

In the natural course of events, the elder Raikes being childless, his estate would have passed to his brother Cuthbert and to Gerry. This might still be, could they prove Cuthbert's death. But Gerry's uncle had a horror of estates "tied up in chancery," of riches wasted by the courts—"doing no good to anybody." So he had provided that if Gerry could not supply evidence of his father's death or details of his whereabouts within a certain time, the whole property was to go to a distant cousin and her heirs.

Seeking a man who has been lost for eighteen years calls for publicity. Gerry told his tale to all and sundry. It had been advertised in hundreds of papers before he started north. The whole matter was a stale romance by now. General opinion held that he might just as well be in Barrow as in Nome for all the trace he would find of his father.

Some consolation was to be got out of this evident truth, but still inaction irked him. A man with money in his pockets could have hired dogs and companions and made his way back to civilization; but Gerry was penniless. He no longer owed Captain Jonas. He had earned before the mast enough to pay his debts and buy himself suitable clothing. He was free to go. Free—with the ice pack jamming in on the shore.

If Gerry spoke of his predicament, Jonas, who had lost a good ship, would give a great laugh. "You should worry! 'Tisn't much news you'd learn in Nome. Your fortune went, my boy, when your

dad started through Canada with the gold rush. It wasn't only him disappeared in them days. Dropped, they did, like ninepins, going over the mountains. Froze, some of 'em. Drowned like rats in the rapids—rats they wuz, too, lots of 'em!"

"But my father wasn't that kind of man——" Gerry would begin, and then clip his sentence short. What use to try and explain the magnificent, overpowering Cuthbert Raikes to such fellows! He kept his traditions of the spendthrift to himself and gave the seamen his inherited mirth, feeling bitterly lonely often, while blowing sweet harmonies through his mouth organ or twanging "The Irish Washwoman" on a jew's-harp.

Then Kak, the Copper Eskimo, had come to Barrow for the whaling season. He was the first companion of his own age whom Gerry had known for months. They fraternized immediately. The native's excellent English and his command of hunting lore made the slightly older youth look up to him. Raikes entertained a vague idea that Kak would be a good one to help him find his father; but unfortunately the Eskimo had other plans. Right after his encounter with the whale, he had hurried off fifty miles down shore to visit his friends Race-the-Wind and Avranna. He had not asked Gerry to go along, but had promised to return and take him walrus hunting.

And now they were actually in the boat, paddling swiftly along the edge of the shore lead, accompanied by Kak's friend—a small, wiry native with a face like a Japanese and a name like a fairy

tale—Race-the-Wind! "My hat! What a people —what a name!" Gerry laughed aloud. He heaved a sigh of deep rapture.

Little waves jabbling on the surface spanked the bottom of their umiak. A light breeze played over their mosquito-bitten cheeks. The salt air was stimulating after the land heat. It seemed scarcely necessary to breathe. All one had to do was just to open one's mouth and let the winy air pour down. The three paddled a long way in silent enjoyment.

"Where are these walrus?" Raikes asked suddenly.

"Down here—farther on. It's a sure thing. We just passed them coming along. The ice is black with them."

"Some kill!" Race broke in. "There'll be a hot time in the old town to-night!" He sang the words pretty well in tune, and Gerry's eyes opened wide.

"Where did you learn that?"

"In Nome," the singer answered nonchalantly, for he was a widely traveled man. "The old songs are the best—anyway, this is a good one for us. Look behind."

Gerry glanced over his shoulder. Umiaks strung out in a line half a mile long. The whole village had put to sea. They were coming in bunches of twos and threes, as if on a picnic, the crews calling jokes to one another, talking and laughing.

"We ought to have music to head the procession," said Kak. "Get out the old mouth organ, sailor. No—the sound won't matter. Walrus are nearly

deaf. We'll see them long before they can possibly hear us."

Gerry drew the requested instrument from his pocket and tootled sweetly up the scale. His friends grinned happily. A moment later the strains of "In the Good Old Summer Time" floated out on the ambient air.

Being short-handed the boys' umiak gradually lost place. The flotilla crept abreast. Paddles plied in rhythm to the tune. The natives who weren't working beat time with their hands, and some kept it up with their feet. A couple of sailors from the *Sallie Smith* yelled for their favorite songs. The company cheered and laughed, a few even essayed to sing. The sun shone. The water sparkled. In gala array—grouped around Gerry like a convoy—the umiaks covered monotonous miles.

## CHAPTER IV

### TUSKS AGAINST GUNS

"A-TA!"

The leading canoe had swung around a point and its crew could see, floating a half mile from shore, many large cakes of old blue ice. Several were banked with black walrus herds that had climbed out of water to bask in the sunshine.

The Eskimos threw up warning arms with their cry, and Gerry turned from musician to hunter. He dipped his paddle silently, expertly, eager for a first glimpse of the marked prey. The sight did not disappoint him. Huge black bodies lay in serrated rows with heads thrust upward and white tusks gleaming.

"Whew! Don't they look wicked!" the stranger whispered, but Kak replied in a level voice:

"They are stupid things and cowardly. Anyway we don't need to get near them. We will sneak in behind, creep up on them, and shoot before they know there is any danger."

"Some of the fellows will be clubbing them," Race added.

"I'd like to see that!"

"Keep your eyes open, then. When they begin to move, close in and take a swing or two yourself.

There's nothing like a hand-to-hand fight for thrill."

"Wow, it sounds that way!"

A cold shiver ran down Gerry's back. He was agog with excitement. He had promised himself big game ever since coming to Point Barrow, but so far had seen no luck. If he joined in trailing a white bear they failed to find it. If he fired at seals swimming in the leads they promptly sank and nobody knew whose gun had done the mischief. This looked like his big chance. He put all his fresh strength into the paddle, and their boat flew over the water. Their umiak was among the first to reach the ice, but Kak insisted on going to a distant cake.

"I want to get some good shots without killing people," he explained, as they slid in close to the floating island, scrambled out, and drew the boat up on the ice.

The party walked to within easy range of the animals, took careful aim, and fired. Two evil-looking heads instantly dropped, tusks down, while the great bodies slackened quietly as if settling for a nap. Race and Kak had shot their victims through the brain.

Gerry, however, showed his lack of skill. The big one he had singled out gave a bellow that startled the whole herd. Angered by the pain of a shoulder wound, it threw open its fierce mouth, and roared defiance. Then it began to waddle awkwardly toward the water. Other walruses lay in its path, but that seemed of no importance. Fear

and pain drove the creature on relentlessly. It bunted its mates, thrusting them out of the way with its heavy body. It rolled on them, it rolled over them, all the while screaming like a railway engine gone mad.

The rest of the herd took alarm and began to scramble for the sea. Kak followed them up, firing every few seconds. Each report added one more to the motionless forms on the ice—black blots ringed with scarlet, left behind as the other beasts plowed on. The noise of their scrunching over the ice blended with an incessant splashing as the great, unwieldy bodies flung themselves into the ocean.

Gerry's sense of humor triumphed over the instincts of the hunt. The gravity of walrus as potential food fled before their awkward antics. How utterly absurd it was to see these two-thousand-pound warriors, armed with death-dealing tusks, stampeding before three puny humans. All running away as fast as they could, jostling and pushing, wounding each other in their haste. A whole pack of cowards with but a single thought—the safety of the sea! How clumsy they were poking themselves along—their flippers flapping! How grotesque! The greenhorn could not shoot straight for laughing.

Meantime Kak and Race were pushing ahead. Excitement had got into them. They tasted the joys of the chase and fired as they ran, killing walrus after walrus, stopping to finish off some of the wounded in passing.

Suddenly Gerry recollected the practical side of

the game. He had yet to account for a single beast. Only a piker could leave this field empty-handed. If he did, how the others would guy him! He raised his rifle quickly, pointing at a great bull that loomed up about halfway between him and the screaming herd. He took deliberate aim, steadying his nerves, but, just as he was going to pull the trigger, a dark line flashed across his field of vision. Race darted in behind the animal and out the other side.

The sailor's muscles contracted. In fearful reaction from what he might have done, he gave a terrified human yell. At the sound both the other hunters stopped.

"What are you trying to do—kill me?" Race cried, as he saw Gerry lowering his gun. "Don't waste your ammunition on that brute. He's wounded already. Watch me make an end of him!"

Pulling a knife from his belt the Eskimo sprang back at the walrus, primed for his foolhardy act by a desire to show off. The monster was stretching up, glowering after the fear-maddened herd whom he had no power to follow. His gigantic size dwarfed Race-the-Wind to a mere pygmy. But the champion, if bantam weight, was swift, sure, light. He danced on the ice waiting for his chance, his arm raised ready. All at once his foot struck a projecting splinter, and he tripped and fell forward against his opponent. The knife plunged harmlessly into the fat shoulder, and the beast answered with a bellow of rage.

Kak dared not shoot. He was far away and on

the wrong side. It was up to Raikes. "Help—there—you!" he yelled, knowing that in a moment those fierce tusks would sink into his chum's back.

Gerry dared not fire. He did not trust his aim. Despair flung him on primitive methods. He grasped his rifle by the barrel. He covered the distance in three leaps. For a second he stood face to face with the walrus, looking into its beady eyes, gaping at its dreadful mouth. Then hate rushed over him. A blood lust he had never before known lent him double strength. With one swing he brought the heavy breech of the gun against the animal's shallow skull. There was a crash, a nasty shattering sort of a crash, and a couple of thousand pounds of flesh rolled over at his feet—dead.

The sailor, who was no sportsman, stood staring, open-mouthed, asking himself, "Did I do that?" It seemed impossible. "How could I do it—kill a huge beast single-handed—with a single blow?" The evidence amazed him.

Splash! Splash! That continuous sound of the escape filled Gerry's ears, but his eyes remained riveted on his prey. Pride struggled against horror. The deadness of the inert mass seemed overwhelmingly awful. So this was the way it made a chap feel to kill big animals—sort of sick at his stomach? Gradually the squeamishness passed, and a new sense of his own power sprang in its place. He saw himself no end of a fellow. He began to feel that a man—a real man of thews and action—ought to take his life seriously.

Race was still prattling thanks when Kak came up and put a bullet through the enemy's brain. "Just to make sure of that deadness," he explained. "You might only have stunned the critter, and I wouldn't give much for our chances if his Nibs came to when we had him tied to the boat halfway home."

The plop, plop, plop of bodies falling into water had ceased. The remainder of the herd had all swum away while the hunters' backs were turned.

"Oh, well, we've got enough," Kak said, looking over the field of carnage. "Let's bring the boat around this side and take Gerry's bag first. We can manage two."

The sailor nodded gravely. That merry and bright youth was uncommonly silent while they worked tying a couple of air poks onto the carcasses to buoy them up as they were towed behind the boat.

"Another paddle or two wouldn't come amiss now," Race sighed as they shoved off.

The boys had gone farther afield than any of the other hunters, and were out of sight of their companions, for most of the umiaks had loaded quickly and started home. The three were in no undue haste to get back, however. They paddled easily among the ice cakes, Race telling stories and cracking jokes. Life is just one lark after another to a person of his temperament, and natural gayety will out.

Youth knows no satiety—in other words, it can never have enough. Although taking home the

meat of the animals they had already killed would keep them hustling for some time, when they came on another floating island, its white surface black with sleeping beauties, Kak could not pass.

"Let's pick off a few fat fellows from the boat," he begged.

Gerry suddenly shed his solemnity all in a piece like a snake's skin. "Hurrah! Go to it. You fellows have a match. See which can shoot the largest number before they all wallop into the water. I'll count for the start."

The two Eskimos, who had been rivals before in more serious contests than this, raised their rifles.

"One, two, three—fire!"

The guns cracked simultaneously, and two black heads that had been darkly limned against the azure sky abruptly vanished. The marksmen let themselves go. Crack, crack, crack, crack—a rattle of rifle shots roused the herd and sent them plunging into the sea.

Gerry had had enough killing for one day, he was content to watch. And these lumbering beasts put up a good show, far better than the first lot, for now they were coming head on, crazily flopping and wriggling, pushing themselves with their silly flippers, crowding each other, shoving each other off the ice, rolling pell-mell, helter-skelter, anyhow into the ocean.

Near the ice edge the water was one white line of splashing circular waves and rising spray. The sea soon frothed from the agitation of frenzied walruses swimming in every direction, fierce wit-

less creatures, conscious of danger, but not knowing whence it came nor how to get free from it.

"Jiminy! What a herd!" Kak said, standing up for a better view. "Shoot the ones behind, Race. If they fall in the water they'll sink."

Crack, crack, splash, crack, plop!

"Go it, boys!" Gerry had risen too, partly from apprehension. Never in his wildest dreams had he imagined such a scene. The umiak lay in a channel between two ice cakes, and these crazy animals, each weighing from one thousand to two thousand pounds, were swimming around them like a swarm of gigantic rats—bearded rats, tossing great ivory tusks, glaring at their persecutors out of shoe-button eyes.

Presently Kak stopped to reload. He turned away from the sunshine blinking and winking dazzlingly on the choppy sea, and so got a glimpse of the far gunwale.

"Akale! Take care!"

The others swung around in time to see a walrus that had swum under them raise its head not eighteen inches from the side of the umiak. These huge mammals, though awkward and easy prey while on the ice, once they get into the water change to swiftly moving, dangerous enemies. They do not often turn on their pursuers, but if they turn while swimming they have a tremendous advantage. This one was quite too close for comfort.

"Oh, you'd attack, would you?" Race taunted, and, shoving his rifle into the creature's face, pulled

the trigger. The hammer clicked on an empty magazine.

"Watch out—behind!"

At Gerry's cry the little Eskimo cast a swift, fearful glance over his shoulder, and saw a young bull bearing down on them with gleaming tucks all set to strike. "Shoot him, Kak," he wailed.

Kak's fingers were working nimbly, but not nimbly enough. Race turned to meet the attack. The second walrus was at his end of the boat, almost on him. He gripped his gun by the barrel, intending to finish the creature as Gerry had swatted his victim on the ice, and at the same time calling to the others to look after number one!

"If he hooks on the gunwale we're lost!"

The stark fear in that cry made the sailor's scalp prickle. His hair seemed to rise on end. He had not realized their danger until then, for he did not know the walrus's worst form of vengeance. If one of these beasts once gets its tusks fastened on the side of a umiak, it is all over with the hunters. They have not the shadow of a chance of displacing those strong hooks with a ton weight hanging on them, and so must stand helpless until the enemy drags their gunwale under and the boat fills. This means destruction of the umiak and all in it. For, unlike a wooden boat, the skin craft will not float submerged, but when filled with water founders and sinks to the bottom.

The sailor's eyes bulged. He saw the ugly head had already struck at them, and that the tip of

one tusk was over the side. "Kak, Kak, shoot quick! The brute's got us," he wailed.

Fortunately Kak knew better than to shoot. A live animal will at least show fight, but the dead weight of a dead animal sinking would certainly capsize the boat. Flinging his useless rifle to the bottom of the umiak, he seized an oar and jabbed at the evil face. The walrus, finding it had so poor a hold, raised its head to strike again. Instantly Kak gave a vicious thrust at the exposed throat, caught the animal under its chin, and shoved. Both the boat and the beast yielded. The distance widened between them. Kak dropped the oar, seized his rifle, and planted a bullet in the creature's brain.

The action had been almost too quick to follow, and was synchronous with Race-the-Wind's defense on the other side. When the flat-bottomed umiak slid from the impact of Kak's blow it was thrust toward the other walrus, with a wallowing side roll as it righted from the drag of the first animal's weight. It shifted only a few inches, but enough to make Race miss his swing. He almost shot into the ocean. As he staggered to regain his balance the young bull's sharp tusks ripped into the skin covering and tore through. The boat careened from side to side.

Gerry, so far paralyzed, suddenly remembered his revolver. He plucked it out and emptied it in the direction of the black head. The monster sank, while his destroyer stood dumbfounded, gazing into the whirlpool that gurgled down on death.

"Bail, kid, bail! Don't stand there gaping at what may be your own grave."

Water was pouring into the umiak. Kak tried to pack the leak with an old rifle rag, but as the slits were long and ran below the surface of the choppy little waves it didn't do much good. Gerry and Race fell to, bailing with tin cans, while their companion, manipulating the sweep oar, quickly propelled their craft to the nearest landing. All three leaped out and lost not a minute in hauling the damaged boat up on the ice.

"Where do we go from here?" Raikes whistled, gazing dubiously at the two rough tears in the umiak's side, and over the miles of sparkling water lying between them and home. "Some predicament!"

"Oh, that's all right!" answered the jovial Race, showing two sets of perfect teeth. "Kak's going to sit on the hole all the way back."

For a moment Gerry "bit." He glanced up, questioning. "How say?"

The Eskimo roared. "Kak's going to sit on it with the seat of his pants."

"Not my *pants,*" objected Kak.

"Well, all right. I'll let you off with the tail of your coat. Turn around."

To Gerry's amazement the independent Kak obediently turned about and allowed Race to cut a large piece out of the skirt of his perfectly good caribou tunic. Is this some fetish against drowning, he wondered, or a rite practiced after killing walrus? The stranger had seen some queer cere-

monies among the natives. He knew it was customary to pour a dipper of fresh water into the mouth of a dead seal, for seals living in salt water are supposed to like a drink. Kak had killed the largest number of walrus, maybe his clothing was to be used as a prayer rug. "It will take more than incantations to mend that hole, though," he told himself.

Afraid of offending his companions, the white man remained silent while Race drew from some inner pocket a small leather case. When opened this revealed sinew and needles. Race caught the sinew in the middle and tore one thread of it away from the rest.

"Gosh!"

The sailor's jaw dropped. He could scarcely believe his eyes. That amazing Eskimo proceeded to mend his boat by sewing a patch on the hull. He made a good job of it too—neat stitches properly set—so that when the umiak was put in the water again it proved perfectly seaworthy. And they paddled home with the tail of Kak's coat "sitting on the hole" all the way.

## CHAPTER V

### CUTHBERT, THE MAGNIFICENT

THE villagers had light hearts that evening. The walrus were cut up on the beach and divided, everybody getting an even share. Piles of fresh meat reassured the sometimes hungry natives. Choice cuts were carried home and feasts prepared. The odor of cooking ascended to heaven.

All the Eskimos sat at their evening meal except one woman. A beautiful dark-eyed girl, with heavy braids of glossy hair hanging over her shoulders, stood on the shore gazing under her hand down the wake of the midnight sun, watching for her man. This was Avranna, Race-the-Wind's wife.

Since their arrival that morning she had made camp, pitched the tent, unrolled the bedding, arranged her household gods, and set the dinner pot ready by the fire. She had visited Brower's trading post also and bedecked herself with a gaudy string of amber-colored beads. Wound around her head, coronet fashion, they brought out the golden glint of her soft eyes. They made her decorative.

Nothing pleased Avranna more than the addition of some foreign trinket to her wardrobe. She was a personage and she looked forward to creating a sensation with her new vanity. She had dis-

covered for herself the value of these ornaments, so far ignored by the Eskimos, and she intended to set the style. Her anxiety for the boys' return was partly to hear them praising her appearance and backing up her judgment. When the heavily laden umiak labored to the end of its final mile and grounded on the beach, she was still watching, with the faithful Kanik, Kak's dog, at her knee.

Kak hopped out, displayed their trophies proudly, and presented Gerry.

The young sailor succumbed to Avranna's charms without a struggle. He thought her one of the loveliest women he had ever seen. Later on he told himself this was because the other natives looked so plain, but at the start her spell overpowered him. He was rather afraid of her. She talked to him, laughing, and he could not understand a word. He could only hope that she was not laughing at him, while even his ears turned red. Not being able to answer, just standing there, grinning, made him seem a boob. It didn't make him look any bigger fool than he felt, however. If he had not already asked the boys to supper with him, he would have been too tongue-tied to issue the invitation.

Gerry lived in a very fine camp. For weeks he had had nothing to do but fix it up. The tent was made of willow poles set in a wide circle, lapped at the top, and securely tied. Over this frame, sailcloth was spread. Raikes did not own the tent; the material used in its construction had been borrowed from Charlie Brower; still, it passed as his

place. Sailor though he was, Gerry found it impossible to live happily in drab or crowded quarters. His meager baggage had been lost in the wreck of the *Sallie Smith,* but one so well endowed by nature did not need possessions. Instead of pictures to decorate his home he had drawn with red ocher on the caribou skins—also borrowed from Charlie—rude but convincing sketches of dog races, Kak's whale, seals on the ice, a flight of birds. Hung around, they made an imposing display. Avranna went wild about them and told Race he must buy those skins for her when the white man left.

Race was afraid the happy owner, enriched by these art efforts, might put a fabulous price on them. And Gerry, after laughing at the idea of Brower putting any value on his work, magnificently offered to draw more pictures if Avranna brought him new skins. The lady beamed, for she argued that new skins would last longer and would be even more envied by her neighbors. They were all very merry.

The host cooked while Kak fed the fire, passed dishes, moved about opening cans, the mysterious contents of which were to follow a first course of walrus meat and make the meal a real feast. Each time the assistant cook bent over, the loose sides of his tunic flapped open showing the great gap at the back, and everybody laughed uproariously.

The story of their hunt had to be told in detail. Race and Gerry had done wonders, but Kak had killed the most. When Avranna heard this she tried to decorate him with her beads. He would

have none of it. He pushed her off, rather roughly, and the string caught on his forehead and snapped. The amber glass cascaded over him. A wild wail broke from Avranna as she saw her treasure scattered, rolling in every direction. There she stood clutching a mere half dozen beads in her plump hand, with the ends of the cotton string dangling down—and none of the people at home had even seen them!

"Bad luck!" Kak's tone spoke dismay, but he did not move to repair the damage.

"It serves her right, she ought to decorate me," said Race, grinning from his corner, and pretending to be very jealous.

Gerry was picking up the beads. He put them in a little pile on the center of his bed, carefully avoiding looking at Race's wife, for he had glimpsed wet eyelashes and felt terribly afraid the girl would cry. It was a bother, of course, about her silly beads, still, he thought Kak and Race dreadfully unsympathetic. He prodded Kak with his foot and made him get up and hunt all around where he had been sitting.

Meanwhile Avranna crouched at the side of the bed, mournfully lifting the trinkets by handfuls and letting them dribble between her fingers. The cotton thread was too soft to shove through their small centers, and she had no needles with her fine enough. To-morrow Charlie Brower would hunt her up better thread perhaps, but to-morrow is not to-night. She crooned a little song to her treasures and held the glass globules against her flushed cheek,

looking as pretty as a picture on a magazine cover. Gerry's soft heart began to beat very hard under his flannel shirt. He felt like thrashing both his friends for their cold indifference to the beauty's woe. Suddenly he remembered how the girls at home used to thread beads on violin strings.

"Say, Race, let's see that sewing case of yours," the host demanded in a bossy voice.

Race handed the kit over, remarked to Kak in Eskimo, "No good—it won't knot."

Gerry took the piece of sinew out of the case and, starting at the end, tried clumsily to separate one strand from the rest. Race, watching his awkward efforts, laughed and presently told him to hold the sinew in the middle. That attracted Avranna's attention. As soon as she saw what the white man was doing, she sprang up, snatched the sinew out of his hand, and very expertly drew a fine thread from the piece.

Piercing each bead with the bare end of the sinew was a tedious job even for a woman's delicate fingers. Her arched eyebrows drew together—but she persisted. The last bit of amber glass was finally plucked from Gerry's bed and put in place. Then she laid the full sinew beside the cotton string and found it shorter by one bead—one bead! Just one was missing. It must be in the tent. It must be found.

What a hullabaloo the woman raised! Streams of Eskimo flowed into the night, for it was already late. She stormed, she gesticulated, she explained. The boys hunched moodily in their places—they

were tired and disinclined to move. Against their stony calm Avranna raised Cain. Then suddenly quietness fell on the tent. The lady went over to Race and began to coax. That was too much. With a grunt her husband got up and shook out the rug he had been sitting on. He hunted in the tufts of grass still left on the tent floor where the beads had first fallen. He kicked Kak up and made him hunt too. They searched every nook and cranny, Avranna urging them on. In desperation Race groveled under the bed, wriggling on his stomach like a seal hunter, and reappeared with one small yellow bead.

His wife fell on the prize, squealing her joy. Carefully she added it to the full thread, Gerry sitting beside her on the bed watching the process with the acknowledged interest of an inventor. And then, when the string was completed, that thankless girl got up and, carrying it over to Kak, asked him to tie the ends together.

For no reason at all Gerry felt very cross. He forgot his manners as host and sauntered to the door, both hands in his pockets, whistling. A view of the tented world and the umiaks drawn up on the beach brought him back to a sense of where he was. He felt ashamed of his pettiness—with a native! And to cover the gap between him and his guests he called back: "Nice breeze here." In answer the three came outside. A fresh breeze from the sea had blown away the hordes of flies and it was very pleasant.

Avranna appeared wearing her beads. She could

play the matron when she liked and with self-complacence unimpaired was ready to patronize her young host. But Gerry's attitude remained distantly polite. He invited them to sit down. The village had already gone to sleep, exhausted from hunting and feasting. Even the dogs were curled up, noses under paws. The post, lying so silent in the flashing sunlight, seemed weirdly unreal.

"I guess it's high time to go home!" Race stretched and yawned. His day had started with a twenty-mile walk from their last camp before the walrus hunt. He was weary.

"Night, Kak. Night, Gerry. Come along, Avranna."

Without more ado the head of the house walked off, and Mrs. Avranna had to follow him.

Kak was staying with Gerry.

The boys came to the conclusion that the air would be better outside than in the tent, so they pitched a fly net and settled under it—but they did not sleep. The world was so marvelously bright. The remains of their fire paled to gray ash before the beat of the sun. The sea still danced and sparkled. It was all silent also. Not a ripple of a wave sounded from the shore; not a bird cheeped. Only Kak's dog snored gently beside them, snapping occasionally at some particularly rabid mosquito. This was an hour for talk—for intimate exchanges. Such an hour as Gerry had looked forward to.

Kak began with: "What do you think of Avranna?"

"She's a flirt." Gerry would say no more on the subject.

"She admired your pictures. This is a dandy place you have here! I guess she'll be making old Race buck up and fix her a tent like it."

"Humph!"

They lay still for a while, Gerry revolving in his mind the idea of getting Kak to help him find his father. Very diplomatically he began to talk about Cuthbert Raikes.

"This isn't such a bad hole." He glanced at the outside of the tent deprecatingly. "A fellow's got to live decently wherever he is. Gee! I wish you could have seen the way my father lived. Mother's told me about it hundreds of times. He always wanted everything big—large rooms, large furniture, heavy silver. He wouldn't ever drive behind one horse, must have two—a prancing pair or a tandem. Sometimes he drove six."

"Six is a good team," the Eskimo allowed, mentally confusing horses with dogs.

Gerry stared a moment. How could Kak understand? He saw a picture of a coach and six, sweeping through an English village, the driver perched as high as the ridgepoles of the thatched cottages, the postboys standing in their stirrups, the footman with his long horn winding his "tallyho!" Suddenly the vision changed. His father's coach was racing across the tundra, the horses at full gallop. It came on and on. It flashed past and whirled away to the North Pole or some such bourne.

Gerry rose on his elbow to watch. Then he fell back with a harsh sigh. The vision had been startlingly real. Often his soul yearned for the fleshpots created by his father. "Anyway, dad lived while he lived!" thought the boy.

"Go on," said Kak.

"My father was an extremist. He used to race his yacht lying over on her side, scudding along with one gunwale under the boiling waves. He never took her out in calm weather. Never! And that seemed a pity, too, because she was all dolled up with silver-plated binnacle, teak decks, and the Lord knows what. Dad used to take mother to the swell shops and order a dozen dresses for her at once. And he never allowed her to wear any of them a second time in public—no matter how much she liked them."

"What was the sense of that?" asked the practical listener.

"No sense—it was just his way. If he had to make a journey a private car wasn't enough. He'd order a private train and pay through the nose for it. He built a great place out on the lake shore, with a stone wall ten feet high all around it, and he used to breed bloodhounds to keep trespassers away. The bloodhounds weren't popular, but everybody loved dad. There'd be stag parties at night in the whale of a big dining room, with all its heavy silver shining under hundreds of candles—parties just for men, you know. My mother'd be upstairs. Sometimes she'd go out and hang over the balus-

trade with the maids and listen to 'em singing: 'For he's a jolly good fellow!'—Oh, I had a great dad! I wish I might find him alive!"

The homesick feeling stirred up by Avranna's unkindness broke in Gerry's voice.

Kak, propped on his elbow, was listening, open-mouthed. This was the sort of tale that thrilled him, as much of it as he understood. He would have liked to go to Chicago and have silver and candles and yachts. He bore the silence as long as he could and then prodded Gerry's remembrance.

"Well, what happened?"

"It all went blooey. Dad got caught in the wheat pit and lost everything. The place was mortgaged to the limit, you see——"

"What does it mean—wheat pit and mortgaged?"

Gerry paused. He realized there were sides to civilized life that Kak, with all his cleverness and ambition, really could not understand. So what was the sense of explaining? "It has to do with money," he answered lamely. "Father's fortune bust and we moved to a small house in a little suburb. Then he came north to find gold and get a second start. He didn't travel in a special train that time; but he didn't hide his light under a bushel either. There's one thing I can be dead sure of, if I ever come across anybody that met Cuthbert Raikes going to the Yukon, he won't have forgotten him!"

Kak lay pondering these marvels; presently he spoke. "Gerry, can you draw a private train, and

horses, and a yacht, and candles and all those things?"

"I guess so," the artist said, wondering. "I can make a stab at it, anyway. Of course a train looks just the same whether it's a private train or not."

"Does it? Well, I think it would be fine to have a tent like yours decorated with pictures of things we don't see up here—high houses, you know, and some of the things in Brower's magazines. If you'll draw me some horses and tandems and such things I'll pay you money for it—I've got a good deal of money, trapping and working for explorers —several hundred dollars. And if I pay you in money you'll be able to hire a boat and get back to Nome in plenty of time to find your father."

Gerry hid his face on his arm. He was feeling lonely enough to be moved by friendship.

"Kak, I knew you were a white man," he said in a muffled tone, "but I couldn't take your money. The work's not worth it. I'll be tickled to death to draw all the pictures you want, if you'll promise to be my pal."

"Sure we're pals," the Eskimo answered. "You're my friend—next to Omialik. We'll talk about pictures some other time. Let's go to sleep now."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SECRET ADVENTURE

GERRY'S tent was now turned into a studio of sorts. First he did the pictures for Avranna. These were easy; he had only promised to copy the sketches already on his walls. But when it came to Kak's order the artist labored to excel himself. In a certain way he was drawing for the honor of the Raikes family, as well as for his patron. To him and to Kak the objects he depicted were the actual objects once owned by his father. That yacht had been Cuthbert Raikes' *Water Fowl,* that private train was his.

The boy worked for hours trying out sketches on old material. Only when the wild action of his amazing horses reached a point worthy of the Raikes coach did he transfer them to caribou skins.

The Eskimo had "talked about pictures" many times, and had taken his own high-handed way in regard to payment. Either Gerry accepted money, or the deal was off. Art proved profitable to the sailor in more ways than one. After the walrus meat was all gone, Kak kept the larder full. The boys lived happily together. The native would sit for hours watching Gerry work. Sometimes he tried to play the mouth organ, but with little success.

Mostly they talked. Endless stories of Cuthbert's magnificence poured from the lips of his admiring son, the listener accepting even the most astonishing flights of imagination as gospel truth.

"I'll bet you, Gerry," he said one day, "if your dad had ever come up here he would have discovered the mountain of jade."

Gerry pricked up his ears. "What's that? Jade doesn't come in mountains—it's a precious stone."

Kak was a patriot. Omialik, the explorer whom he had worshiped since he was twelve years old, had taught him many things about the natural resources of the country—her forests, her coal mines, her oil and minerals, the herds of reindeer that might be bred on her wide tundras—all embryo wealth. If the Eskimo bragged occasionally it was justifiable.

"Haven't you ever heard of the mountain of jade?" he asked, incredulous. "Didn't you ever see old Tannaumirk's labrets—the jade pair—and his little jade adz? . . . Well, of course, it's a secret and Tannaumirk is pretty close about it all, so maybe he wouldn't be showing them to strangers."

At the commencement of this speech Raikes was expertly outlining the hind legs of the right leader, but before the end he sat back on his heels and gazed at his friend.

Native secret—jade—hidden treasure! Old Tannaumirk, the man with a face of leather pouches, all wrinkled and rolled like a plowed field—so he knew things, secret things! Gerry was studying Kak. That lad knew things, too. The sailor won-

dered how much he knew of ancient Eskimo secrets, how much he was holding back. For a moment the white man's eyes were riveted, speculative; then all at once he returned to his work, saying nonchalantly:

"Go ahead and spill the yarn. I won't tell."

Kak lay on his stomach, kicking his feet in the air. This brought his head close to Gerry's. He lowered his voice to a conspirator's whisper:

"Old Tannaumirk comes from the Mackenzie River district and the people around there have always had lots of ornaments made out of jade. None of us know when they began to make them, nor how they made them. Jade is an awfully hard stone and it wears forever. The ornaments have been handed down by the old folks to the younger folks, generation after generation, so that none of the people who own them now know much about them. There is a mountain of that precious stone somewhere back in the hills—but nobody knows where."

"A whole mountain of lost treasure," Gerry whispered, pausing in his work.

"Yep. It's my opinion it's not lost, really. I think Tannaumirk knows the location. It seems reasonable that the man who found such a prize would tell somebody before he died, and he would tell somebody else before *he* died, and so on. I believe it's a shaman's secret. Some of the old, old fellows know, but they are close-mouthed about it. They don't want the white men to discover the jade, because they say white men grab everything

they find and carry it out of the Arctic. In a way they are robbing us——"

"What nonsense! Look at all the stuff we bring in."

"That's another story," said Kak doggedly. "They certainly do take things away. Consider the whalebone they took when it was worth big money. They buy our clothes and hunting gear and utensils and remove them. They take birds' nests and eggs. They even carry off the bones of dead animals—caribou antlers and musk-ox horns—I've seen them take skulls——"

"But we bring trade goods in place of those worthless things—" Gerry's voice sounded argumentative. Kak hastened to mollify him.

"Jiminy crickets, yes! I agree with you. I'd rather have a rifle than any amount of bows and arrows. I'm just telling you what the old folks say. They think if the white men found our mountain of jade, they would go and blow it up with gunpowder, like they do the ice, and would carry it all away to their own land—otherwise what would be the use of finding it? Still, I believe the shamans are right to keep their secret—we want the Arctic for the Eskimos."

Gerry remained silent. He was thinking hard. This story of hidden treasure had him all wrought up. His Celtic soul reacted to romance. Inheriting an estate somewhere in a dull old country like England wasn't in it with discovering a lost mountain of solid treasure and being a millionaire with a mysterious, inexhaustible source of wealth, able

to cut a dash like his father! Gerry felt the treasure was already theirs if he could only persuade Kak. He rose to the occasion with a fine display of tact.

"Look here. Old Tannaumirk is right in one way and wrong in another. Jade is a precious stone. Now you know what makes a precious stone valuable is the scarcity of it. If this mountain of jade really exists and could be found and mined—blown up, as you suggest, and all carted away to Chicago or New York, so that everybody could possess a piece—why, it would soon be as common and worthless as chalk. Nobody would pay anything for it. In that way Tannaumirk is right. It would be a huge mistake to advertise the whereabouts of this wonderful prize. But suppose, now, only one white man knew about it—and one Eskimo?"

Gerry shot a quick glance at his sworn ally. Kak's dark face brooded, his eyes held a look of close attention. The sailor's reasoning was sinking in.

"That would mean a lot of money for both of them, because they'd only sell a small amount of jade each year—a little jade for a big price—see?" All at once excitement broke through the bounds set by diplomacy. Gerry threw down his brush. "Gosh, Kak! If we can find that mountain our fortunes are made! We can mine it in the summers and market it in the winters—and nobody need ever know where we get the stuff. We could make all sorts of things out of it, like the Chinese do——"

"Jade is awfully hard to cut," Kak interjected.

But Gerry's mood was running in high gear. It bowled easily over every objection, driven on by the vast fund of enthusiasm and ignorance that was in him.

"Say, if we could carve it, the stuff would be worth heaps. Here's an idea. I wonder if jade mightn't be like bog oak. Bog oak comes from the trunks of trees that have lain for centuries in the peat bogs in Ireland. When the wood is first dug out of the bog it is as soft as cheese, and they carve it into small pigs and four-leaf clovers, and all sorts of charms. Later on, when the air has been working on it for a while, it turns as hard as iron. Maybe if we cut a hunk of jade right out of the middle of a mountain it would be soft like cheese—eh?"

Kak shook his head. "The pieces that have come down to us are the hardest thing around these parts. I've heard Omialik wondering how our folks ever cut them into any shape at all."

"Well, that is what I'm saying. Maybe it was soft to begin with. Couldn't you ask Tannaumirk? He must know."

"Tannaumirk won't talk about jade. I've asked him often enough. He just shakes his old poll and shuts up."

After a long silence, Gerry said: "Kak, let's go on a prospecting trip."

"What?"

"Let us two go and find the jade."

"But what about your father?"

"We'll do both. Now the sled season is over I

can't get out from here. All the ships are going east. I'll have to wait till August, anyway, to find one sailing west. Let's fill in the time hunting for jade."

Kak smiled. "So long as you're not set on going to Nome, we could have a swell little hunting trip back in the hills."

The white man spoke slowly as if he were discovering something new and strange in the depths of his own heart: "I know I won't ever feel contented again if I don't have a look-see for that jade before I leave the Arctic."

"Then it's settled." Kak's voice suddenly grew more confidential. "I've a pretty good idea what direction——"

"Hist! Wait."

They were inside the tent to be free of pestiferous flies. The sunlight shining through turned the dull canvas to a dome of silver-gilt, inset with irregular panels of black iron where the decorated caribou skins hung against it. No living thing breathed about them but Kak's dog. To a casual observer their surroundings offered utter privacy. But walls have ears—particularly canvas walls, and stealth is the bouquet of romance. Gerry rose, drew aside the rude mosquito netting he had fixed over his door, went out and walked all around the tent. He came in on tiptoe, took his place, and admonished Kak solemnly:

"Remember, not a word about this to anybody. When we find the jade, you understand, it's got to be a goshawful secret. We won't even let folks

know we're going to look for treasure. It's a bit of luck that we can make them believe I'm seeking my father. Go ahead, now, and put me wise to all you know."

Kak was duly impressed. Most of the Eskimos who counted jade among their household gods spoke of it and handled it in an ordinary manner. Gerry, by weaving a mystery around his dream, made its substance take on new value. For the first time in his life Kak visualized the mountain of jade as a concrete and obtainable prize. He spoke with fitting seriousness.

"I believe the mountain lies pretty nearly straight back of Herschel Island, and I'll tell you why. Old Tannaumirk goes up there almost every year. He treks to Herschel, lays in some supplies, and starts off to the back country all alone. There's a story circulated that he has an old friend who lives in there with a trapper named Martin. But like as not that's only a made-up yarn—I've never seen Nick Martin. Maybe Tannaumirk goes in just to make sure that nobody else has found the jade."

"What shall we do to keep him quiet when we've found it?" Gerry spoke positively as if face to face with an actual problem. His faith in his luck amounted to a conviction. It almost lifted him out of the class of gamblers and adventurers. It communicated a thrill to Kak. But the Eskimo was nothing if not practical. He dismissed the question with a shrug:

"Don't let's worry about that yet."

Gerry could be practical also. "Herschel Island

is a long way off." He knitted his brows. He scratched his curly head with the willow twig that formed the handle of his brush. "They'll charge us fifty dollars each for a passage."

Kak seemed visibly to swell. This was one of his moments. He said grandly, "Forget it. By and by my friend Captain Craig will be going through and he'll give me a lift. Perhaps you can work your way. If not, he'll carry a pal of mine cheaper than anybody else. I've got credit at Herschel, too. Enough to buy some ammunition. We've got to have plenty of cartridges, so we can stay as long as we like in the hills."

Shivers of pure joy ran down Gerry's spine. This was adventure! He saw himself and Kak, accompanied by the dog, starting away from the trading post with their camping kits on their backs and their faces set toward the unknown. His father's temperament was boiling in him. The lure of treasure held him fast. It squeezed his heart till every pulse in his body beat like a trip hammer. It made the red corpuscles race to his toes. His face went pale from excess of anticipation.

"Suppose we get lost," the white boy whispered, deliciously savoring the chill in his own blood.

Kak laughed. "What is lost? Being where nobody knows you are? Then we'll be lost from the start."

"That's not exactly it. Lost is being where you don't know you are yourself."

The Eskimo ran his hands over his rough hair and gazed at his friend. He was dimly aware of

Gerry's "bull," but he did not know how to exploit the joke in English, and had to let it pass. "It's impossible for us to be lost," he answered. "We walk into the hills and we go right on until we come out again. So long as I have a spare cartridge for my rifle I can live alone indefinitely."

It was pridefully said, not boastfully, and the pride was justifiable.

"With Kanik for company," the youth added.

Suddenly tired of the discussion, hungry for action, he seized Gerry's paint rag and, balling it in his hands, flung it at the dog. Kanik needed no encouragement. He leaped up and came bounding on his master. Kak rolled over. The pup pranced on him. In a second they were having a wild, playful, tumbling fight all through the tent.

"With Kanik for company, eh, old fellow? With Kanik for company! Kanik will come along on the treasure hunt. Kanik is going to dig up jade with his sharp claws. Good old Kanik!"

"Stop! Stop! Do be quiet!" Gerry hissed in an agony. "Why, you're shouting. Anybody coming along could hear every word. Remember this is a secret!"

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FIRST CLEW

TWO boys and a dog, their backs laden with camp kit and ammunition, trudged over rolling, rock-topped hills. They had been tramping for many days—seeking, seeking.

The little procession moved obscurely like black shadows behind a silver-tissue curtain. Rain slanted against them, taut wires of rain. Rain slanted in their faces, wind driven. It slanted at their sides, splashing back from slippery stones. It slanted behind them, veiling their passage.

The dog's tail was between his legs. The boys' heads peered forward as they plunged on down, through sodden grass, into the stream of the deluge.

All that morning it had been murkily warm. The humidity of the air oppressed them more than the sun's heat as they climbed. About noon black clouds had rolled out of the southwest.

"Thunder," Gerry predicted tersely, pausing to wipe his sweaty neck.

"Hope we have a regular one! I've only seen a few good thunderstorms." The Eskimo looked eagerly toward those dark masses piling low on the horizon.

"This is going to be a humdinger." Gerry cocked

a wise eye upward. The sky directly overhead was gay as a beach umbrella—blue, banded with white. The glower on its rim promised havoc.

"They had a dandy thunderstorm at Herschel three years ago," Kak continued. "But I was in Bank's Island then, far enough away."

"She's coming! My hat, she *is* coming! You're going to see some show, kid!"

The boys walked deliberately along the crest and stood still to watch the storm's advance. First came broad flickers of reflected light, like the opening and closing of a shutter. Several seconds' pause was interrupted by a low muttering and distant peals.

"There she goes!"

"Sounds like the ice pack," said Kak.

"The pack aloft. Sure. It's just the same thing. Clouds careening into each other instead of ice. She's rolling up now like a cavalry charge. Watch!"

On Gerry's word the sky had cracked in a long zigzag, right across the bosom of the sun, it seemed. White fire ran in that lead, stripped raw the native's nerves, and vanished as the clouds closed up again. The wind smote them with terrific force, stampeded in their ears—pulled at their clothes—pushed hard. It made them brace their legs and fight for breath.

"We'd better get down out of this!" Gerry had to bawl above the tumult.

Kak shook his head and yelled back, "I want to watch." Kanik whined. Scrubbing on his belly he twisted in between his master's feet, the tent poles tied to his load scratching over the granite.

"Come on! Come on! It's going to rain pitchforks!" urged the white man. He started ahead.

Suddenly the heavens opened. A glare of blue light played on them from every side. It continued beyond all bearing—beyond reality. At the same instant the artillery of the gods roared and rattled. Sound and fire seemed to envelop the earth. Gerry cowered. The whole universe gave tongue above him. Light pressed him down. Involuntarily he glanced back and upward and saw Kak outlined against that pallid glare. Strong and supple as a young tree the form of the native youth stood up from the rock. His head was thrown back, his mouth open. His distended eyes were fixed on the blue tongue of flame. A gorgeous defiance animated both attitude and expression.

It was over. In the velvet silence following that terrific din Kak remained motionless. Gerry sprang back, seized his chum's hand, and dragged him into action. He would have liked to know which of the primitive instincts—fear, joy, amazement, or the lust of battle—had transfixed the Eskimo. But there was little time to waste on such details. Raikes anticipated the course of the storm and looked for shelter. He pointed toward the valley.

"Holy smoke! I see a tent there by the river. If we can make it we will save ourselves a shower bath."

His words were broken by another clap. A large drop fell on his nose and sent him promptly scrambling down the incline, with Kak following like a dumb animal, and Kanik crawling behind. The

tempest had torn past them, carrying rain on its wings. The clouds had burst. Rain slanted in their faces, stinging. Rain splashed up from slippery stones.

The tent stood with its back to the storm. The door was open, and an old man sat within, watching them. As they clambered lower into the protection of the hills the wind slackened perceptibly. The rain fell straight down. It teemed down, whipping the surface of a small adjacent river into white foam. Pools lay on the grassy lower levels. Water seeped among the willow roots. It glittered on the slender leaves. It ran away from the tent floor which was set on a knoll. When the travelers came within call the old man hailed them:

"You'd better hurry in here."

They entered and began to strip off their wet clothes, while the host brought wood from a pile under a tarpaulin and built a fire.

"It is early for caribou hunting," Kak said. "How are the skins?"

"No good, yet," the camper replied. "I live. I wait."

The old man, who called himself Alunak, was slight and wiry for an Eskimo. His hair grew far back from a high forehead seamed by many wrinkles, and his mouth smiled between parentheses deeply chiseled in the flesh. Two lines of tattooing ran from his nose to the lobes of his ears. From this Kak knew he had killed Indians. If the lines had run from the corners of his mouth to his ears it would have indicated that he had killed whales.

The man's skin resembled a tanned hide from constant sitting in wood smoke. A high-arched nose lent his features great distinction, while the alertness of his eyes, gleaming from their leathery pouches, went far toward restoring his youth.

Gerry took an instant liking to the old soul, and they laboriously exchanged compliments in pidgin English. The bulk of the conversation fell on Kak and it was naturally all about the storm now grumbling its exit among the distant hills.

The rain stopped as abruptly as it had begun, but the sky remained overcast. The boys were glad to avail themselves of Alunak's fire to dry their clothes.

The old man's tent appeared large for a temporary camp. Three dogs slept in one corner. They had roused themselves to sniff Kanik and examine the strangers and had slunk off again at a harsh word from their master. Considerable gear lay about. Evidently Alunak moved seldom. He told the boys he had come from Herschel Island River.

"I didn't know anybody lived on the Herschel," Kak answered, wondering if this could be Tannaumirk's reputed friend. Disappointment wrung him at the thought, for if Tannaumirk's story proved true, their lead for the jade was probably false.

Alunak made no comment. He seemed to be a person of few words, yet one who managed to impregnate silence with courtesy. Nothing could have been kinder than his reception and hospitality. He immediately bestirred himself to cook a meal, and when Kak, examining his boot, found a tear

in it from the rocks, the host would not hear of him unpacking his mending kit. He pointed to the family tool bag in the corner and told the boy to help himself to needles, sinew, anything he needed.

Kak, clad only in a caribou skin wrapped around his middle, moved over and opened the bag. It was crammed full of good tools. He understood at once that Alunak was a man of substance. Our friend is a shaman, he noted, looking through the medley of strange articles.

Curiosity made Kak pretend he could not find the needle case. Asking permission first he dumped the bag's contents out on the bed skins. Besides the customary knives and adzes there was a saw with a copper blade, the sort used at Coronation Gulf, a bow drill set for making fire, a shaft straightener, a bone thumb guard for sewing, a knife sharpener, toggles and many bone pegs, sinew stretchers and skin scrapers. Most of these trophies bore the stamp of having been made by the Killinermiut tribe. Kak knew them well. He eyed their owner covertly, racking his brains to think who the man could be. Eskimo politeness forbade him to ask questions.

Glancing back to the heap of things on the bed, Kak spied a large piece of rough stone. He picked it up, exposing a polished surface, and saw at once that it was jade. Stifling an exclamation he handed this amazing find to Gerry. Their fingers touched, hot as fire, their glances locked with an expression of unutterable triumph.

Aware that Alunak was watching, Gerry hefted

the stone and flipped his thumb nail against it, pretending idle indifference. "Hard," he said, handing it back.

Alunak nodded, smiling. When he smiled the wrinkles about his mouth turned to deep shadows, and the tattoo lines squirmed across his cheeks like worms.

"Show me something else to throw him off the track," Gerry suggested, *sotto voce* and very fast, slurring his English, for they could not guess how much the old man understood. Thereupon Kak took up the nearest object, a Colt revolver, and handed it over for his chum's admiration, exactly as he had offered the jade.

Feigning great interest, Gerry began to examine the old weapon. It had once been a noble firearm. The metal mounting, now as black as the barrel, looked like tarnished silver. Gerry began to rub the butt with his weather-tanned thumb. Gradually the tarnish lightened. The metal was undoubtedly silver. That Midas strain in his blood made the boy rub harder. He liked to see silver gleam. Old Alunak was grinning, pleased at the appreciation of his curio. Seeing it flattered him, Gerry began to rub furiously.

At last he stopped and looked at his work. Gorgeousness had returned to the old gun. The silver did not gleam, but it shone light gray, and standing out on it conspicuously in the original black stain was C. RAIKES.

With a gasping cry Gerry leaped to his feet. He thrust the revolver toward Kak, "Look! Look!"

He tore it away and shoved it at Alunak. "Tell me, where did you get this?" His voice failed. Overcome, he sank on the bed and dropped his face between his hands, struggling for control.

Kak could not read. He exchanged wondering looks with the host. He raised his voice, beseeching: "What's it all about? What's happened, Gerry?"

"My father!" The youth gasped. "Don't you see his name? It was his gun. It's marked with his name. I've found my father!" He sat up, pointing to the engraved letters. Then he slumped back, realizing that the natives could not understand such proof. His urgency took another line. "Ask the old man where he got this gun, Kak. Ask him, Kak. Ask him."

Kak, now as excited as his friend, poured out a volume of questions in rapid Eskimo.

All this time Alunak had been quietly taking notes. The pitch of their excitement was not lost on him. Gerry's clamorous tone, Kak's glinting eyes both told a tale. The revolver which he had seen knocking about uselessly for years meant something to them. Perhaps some strong white magic lay in it. As a shaman, knowing so much of his native magic, he might well admit that white men possessed and practiced potent charms. Alunak believed it was the magic in all guns that made them kill. For himself he knew the incantations that restored to life, he knew the song that killed. He had never sung that terrible song which, sent out upon the air from human lips and a vengeful

heart, would follow and surely encompass the death of an enemy. But he knew how to sing it. He knew the words and the tune. He controlled the magic of the death song.

Old heads are wise heads. The host was a man of few words, more than a match for two delirious lads. He decided to know nothing of this magic gun.

So the answers to Kak's stream of questions divulged very little. The revolver, Alunak claimed, had been in his bag a long, long time. He had got it from a white man. He forgot where. He always understood that it came from the "big river." The gnarled hand pointed south. Gerry nodded violently. "The big river"—that would be the Yukon, or, judging from the haziness of the direction, any of the Yukon's branches—most likely the Bell and Porcupine rivers that formed part of the highway to the Klondike during the gold rush. Kak and Gerry discussed the matter, confirming probability in eager assent.

They showered the old man with a perfect barrage of questions; but he knew no more. They attacked the vital subject again and again, from this side and that, and still Alunak's ignorance stood solid, a blank wall rising between the present and the past. All he could or would tell was that the revolver had come from the "big river."

Would he sell it? The host considered. Yes—at a price. "It is very valuable," he claimed, by which the shrewd trader meant that he saw the boys wanted it badly.

"How much?" Gerry asked, trembling.

"A thousand rounds of ammunition," came the prompt reply.

It was a terrific price, but a possible spot-cash payment. The boys carried with them a case of thirty-thirty. The old man had noted that wealth when the strangers brought it in. He had coveted those good cartridges set down at his door.

"Wow!" Kak threw up his hands.

"I must have the gun!" Gerry groaned. "I know it's your case, Kak, but I'll pay you, honest I will—when I get my money. It all depends on having the gun, see?"

"Pity you didn't fox indifference about this like I did about the jade."

"How could I? I wasn't expecting to find anything—besides, what's jade!" The contempt in his tone made Kak stare.

Gerry's was a facile nature. With evidence at hand, his enthusiasm easily shifted back to his first object. The mythical mountain of treasure sank to nothing alongside this concrete proof of his father's romance. He was hot on the scent of Cuthbert Raikes.

"I suppose we'll have to give the old fellow what he asks," Kak grumbled. "But it sure is the dickens of a price."

"And we can get right on from here across the mountains to the Bell River——" Gerry was all on fire, nervous, eager, his purpose rushing into hasty action. Luckily for him Kak's steady head put the brakes down.

"No, you don't. If we leave Alunak so much ammunition we'll have to return to Herschel for more. We started with twelve hundred rounds, but we've used a lot of it, remember that. I'm not going on any wild-goose chase to the Bell River, with a prospect of living on short rations, and maybe starving before we get out."

"We'll lose time by returning to Herschel."

"You ought to go back anyway and send out word about the gun. It's a clew—weren't you looking for a clew? What's the sense of burying yourself down on the Bell and maybe being too late to turn in more evidence, even if you do find it?"

That kind of talk set Gerry thinking along a new line—a serious line. "Yes, I guess I ought to whirl the news right in. I haven't too much time to spare. Let's hurry back. Why not start right away? If we hang around Alunak may change his mind."

Kak grinned. "He might raise his price, the old schemer! He certainly will if you don't take things easy."

Kak explained they must be on their way now the weather had cleared. "We will travel light," he said, shoving the heavy case of ammunition toward Alunak.

Gerry hung the revolver in its rotten leather holster on the right side of his belt, balancing his other weapon. Big and clumsy, the Colt .45 stuck out from his young thigh. He knocked it continually with his arm, and every time he knocked it

a thrill of pride and hope surged through him. Nothing is more gratifying than to accomplish what one has set out to do.

Gerry Raikes had come to the Arctic to find his father, or traces of his father, and he had won.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE RACE BEGINS

"DANG me! If that ain't Kak and the yellow-haired kid coming across there from the spit."

The front legs of Captain Craig's chair banged down on the hard ground in front of the police station at Herschel Island. He sat forward to look more closely.

The sun was glowing like a live coal on the northern rim of the world. For a moment it seemed to have burnt a dent in the ocean, then its lower curve slipped silently behind the horizon. It was mid-August, and night and darkness, like the wings of a huge, soft moth, were fluttering back to the Arctic. The reflection from the carmined sky dyed the weathered faces of the men to even warmer colors as if a theatrical red "spot" had been turned on. The whites of their eyes looked bloodshot, their teeth, as they laughed and talked, showed pinkish gleams.

"That's Kak's dog," said an Eskimo, squatting on the ground.

"Sure. It's the candy kid all right! I can see the sun color flashing back from his yeller hair.

Makes him look like a bloomin' peony, don't it?" The speaker's glance dropped. He finished cutting a "chew" and slipped the plug of tobacco into his pocket.

"Wonder if the dear boy found his daddy or pegged out on the hunt," said a tall policeman, leaning in the doorway.

"Shouldn't think you'd need trouble your head about that question. There ain't no doubt as to the answer."

A general laugh greeted this sally, for it was well known that Gerry, the good-natured mouth-organ-playing, picture-drawing favorite, liked to live soft. The sailors and policemen at Herschel had all warned him that he would be wasting his time inland. They had foretold how the ups and downs of rocky hills would take the flesh off his bones. They had foreseen this early return.

"Don't be too hard on our artist," drawled "Monkey Fists," a gingery little man who had been sailor, trapper, trader, and lover of the Arctic since his youth. "He's a good kid, and he's losin' a fortune right now—which ain't true of none of the rest of us. It makes me feel kind of sorry for the poor cuss. Think of what he's lettin' slip away while he's gallivantin' over our scenery—fine old manor house, better'n anything the North has got to show, rollin' lawns, parks, room to breathe all to hisself, a dozen or so well-fed, ornamental deer——" laughter punctuated the description. "Deer go big in them parks," Monkey Fists insisted. "We don't know nothink about the value of deer up here on

this uncivilized coast where there's only a couple of million or so roaming around wild. And to think that all that oughter be the boy's, by right. And would be, too, if his worthless scamp of a father had stayed at home like a Christian and died in his golden bed crusted with diamonds."

The speaker slapped a red, hairy hand like a chimpanzee's on his knee and exploded into appreciation of his own humor.

The "Mounty" said: "He must have been quite some punkins, that Raikes, to hear the youngster talk."

"Belay there! If ye don't like his talk get inside, fer we're going to have more of it," Craig admonished. "They're coming along at a pretty good clip fer the day's end. Smart lads, them two!" All eyes were trained on the travelers. A volley of questions stormed their approach:

"Hey, what you folks back for?"

"Did yer legs peg out, little feller?"

"See much game, Kak?"

Craig's large voice rolled above the clamor: "Did ye find any clews, lad?"

"I sure did."

Guffaws of laughter were startled into silence by that answer. The spectators sat dumbfounded while the boys drew near. In the expectant hush Gerry pulled out the Colt .45 and handed it to Craig. It was the proudest moment of his life.

The sea captain nodded his head slowly, eyeing the old firearm, while white men and Eskimos crowded around. Facts spoke for themselves. The

silence broke into mutters and roared on to a riot of congratulation as the story of the boys' find was told in jerky sentences. A dozen hearty fellows, looking like pirates in the bloody sunset, crowded around the curly-headed youth. They slapped him on the back, offered him drinks and smokes, pounded him with questions, not waiting for replies. The revolver passed from hand to hand—knowing hands —amid admiring exclamations. It was raised and dropped on far factitious targets—raised and dropped. Keen eyes examined and appraised it. The silver mounting visibly impressed some of the group. Monkey Fists, scorning anything short of gold, pretended to look anxiously for jewels. He begged Gerry to take him on as gamekeeper. Gerry laughed—a high, light-headed, youthful, nervous laugh. They might jest to their hearts' content; whatever their opinion of the elder Raikes' style, none could deny his name. It stood out boldly across the butt, for all to read who could read— C. RAIKES.

"Kak. Where's Kak?"

The chance query was put and lost in general pandemonium. Somebody had thought of asking about Alunak—his curiosity could wait. Kak had vanished.

The keen young Eskimo was at that moment over in the Hudson Bay trading post telling their whole adventure to McGuire, the factor, seeking information about Alunak himself.

Tom McGuire stood in his grocery shop chewing the mouthpiece of a cold pipe. The trail of tobacco

smoke left by his customers fought with a smell of molasses and gumdrops recently traded. Kak sniffed appreciatively, but the factor was deep in cogitation.

"There's talk of a native living with the trapper Nick Martin, but I don't know if it's true. None of us can tell much about One-Eyed Nick. He's always on the move. Doesn't turn in many skins. Can't do more than merely live."

"I didn't see any white man's gear."

Kak had decided not to mention Tannaumirk or his reputed friend unless somebody else brought the subject up. Gerry's moods were so light they jumped from enthusiasm to enthusiasm easily as a mountain sheep leaping from crag to crag. But it was otherwise with the Eskimo. He believed a man ought to have an object in life, and stick through thick and thin till he accomplished his object or spent himself in the attempt. That was Omialik's way. So far Kak had never been able to find a worthy object. But gradually, through Gerry's excited talk and plans of the last month, the mountain of jade had risen before him as a set purpose.

Kak had not suspected that jade was so valuable until he heard Gerry romancing about it. Nor did he now suspect that his associate was overrating its value. Gerry, as a white man, could be trusted to know the white men's markets. When he said he could sell strings of beads like Avranna's beads for immense sums, if made out of jade, the native believed him implicitly.

Finding his father's revolver had entirely diverted

Gerry's interest from the jade scheme. The setback in no way altered Kak's original plan. Gerry would travel far to claim his estate and he might not return, but in any event Kak would keep right on searching for the treasure mountain, walking endlessly over the hills with his dog, chipping off bits of rock as the white man had taught him—looking, looking. He dare not mention Tannaumirk's name for fear McGuire might know something, might ask him questions and jump to conclusions about his real object. Tom McGuire was a wise one!

The factor had clasped his hands behind his back. He teetered slowly from his toes to his heels, and from his heels to his toes, while he cudgeled his brains.

"Alunak—Alunak. I once heard of an old medicine man east of the Mackenzie called Alunak. He was supposed to control a great number of spirits, and to know the death song. But he must be a regular ancient now—probably dead himself. It's not an uncommon name—Alunak."

Kak cast McGuire a probing glance and changed the subject. "What I came over to say, really, was this. All the men will be giving Gerry advice, you know. You give him some good advice, will you?"

"I'm flattered, Kak," said the factor, smiling and showing a set of strong teeth clamped on his pipestem.

"You talk to him," urged the Eskimo. "You come over now and talk to him good. He's my

friend. Whatever you advise him to do, I'll see him through. Gerry's all for going into the woods now to look for more facts. He doesn't realize that maybe we've seen the only tent in the mountains. He thinks there is a one-man camp in every valley, and every one of the campers full of information about his father. He's planning a tour when he ought to be thinking about sending this news out. The kid doesn't realize how long it takes to do anything up here."

McGuire grew serious. "What's his time limit?"

"I don't understand dates. You come and talk to him." Kak dropped off the counter, where he had been perched, lightly as a cat. He opened the door.

"All right."

Night had closed down. Harsh outlines faded into the Arctic twilight. Voices and the aroma of the captain's cigar broadcasted the presence of the police station group. McGuire and Kak came upon them, around the corner, as unexpectedly as two dark ghosts.

"Have you heard the news? Is that Kak with ye?"

"You bet! Great news!" The factor offered his hand to Gerry. "You've made a good start toward winning out. But mighty late in the day, my lad, mighty late in the day."

It was the first dampening remark Gerry had heard. He felt a quick reaction. In fact the trend of McGuire's congratulation arrested them all.

"What d'ye mean?" growled an old tar.

"Well, I understand the find wouldn't be any use to him at all unless he reported it in time."

"Aw, say! Don't croak. Let a feller enjoy his luck!"

"We don't want no croakin' about dis here t'ing."

"Quit it! Nobody's croaking!" Kak broke in angrily.

"What is the time limit on your news, Raikes?"

"September 10th." Such is the intoxication of success, Gerry's reply was offhand, sure, almost pert.

"And this is August 10th. How in thunder do you calculate to send that news from Herschel Island to England in one month?"

A chorus of boos and bahs greeted his speech, until Clem Craig's voice rose again above the noise.

"You're right, Mac. It'll be nip and tuck—an' not a bottom going west that we know of. I'd take the lad out myself if the ship hadn't laid down on me with her engines."

There was a sudden silence. Gerry slammed from his vaulting mood back to earth, and struck with a nasty mental thud. "Say," he stammered. "No ships! Why, I thought there would be any number of ships sailing west at this time of year!"

"All gone. They were afraid the ice would close in early again. The *Mud Turtle* hove anchor this morning and she was the last. Look for yourself." McGuire jerked his head toward the harbor.

The sky was cut by a single mast rising against the midnight dawn—Craig's ship with her engines out of repair. The young sailor recollected how

Herschel had seemed stripped as they came in. They had been too excited to stop and examine the cause. It was her empty harbor.

"By gum! What am I going to do?"

A very different mood this from his perky tone of a moment earlier. Monkey Fists roared with laughter at the stricken voice.

"Shut up!" somebody said out of the gloom. There was an ominous pause.

"Too late to catch the last boat up the Mackenzie." The police sergeant, who had come to lean in the doorway, spoke for the first time. His brief addition to perplexity was followed by another pause.

"I'll tell yer. Ye can walk out, little feller—walk out on your two pins over the mountains to Eagle. Ye can make it easy that way—providin' ye don't walk too slow!"

The whaler's ironical suggestion met with applause. Kak pricked up his ears. For him this would have been the plain solution. Yet not a white man in the group considered it seriously. The Eskimo said nothing. The experiences of the last few weeks had taught him that Gerry would never take any first prizes in walking races!

"Eagle isn't such a bad idea. The wireless there is a lot nearer than Nome." Tom McGuire was chewing his pipestem again. Cold or warm, the brier was his constant stimulant to thought.

A "Mounty" spoke abruptly: "I have it. Why shouldn't Raikes hike along the same road as his father? Lots of good men have floated down the

Bell River. A raft will carry him to Rampart House and he can take a steamer there for Eagle."

"By gad, boy, you've said something!"

McGuire snatched the pipe from his mouth and stuck it in his pocket. He began to lay down the law with his right forefinger on his left palm. "Raikes goes by boat up the Mackenzie and Peel to Macpherson. And from there follows the old prospectors' trail on foot, over the mountains, to the Bell River—it's about eighty miles. There will be plenty of Indians at Macpherson ready to tote his load. Then down the Bell on a raft to Rampart House. He hires an Indian with a canoe to take him from there to Fort Yukon, where he catches an up-river steamer that makes Eagle in a couple of days."

"Or he may go down river to the wireless at Rampart, if that boat comes along first," the police sergeant added.

"Smooth as silk." McGuire laughed. "Tell me, will you lend the boy a police boat to take him to Macpherson."

"Can do—to-morrow."

Gerry turned to the sergeant, whose silence kept his juniors always a little in dread—to the factor. "Thank you, thank you! It's awfully good of you, helping me through this way."

He knew that they were helping him, that he was virtually beaten without their help. Yet their plans sent a chill to his marrow. His voice rang hollow. The mentors did not seem to take offense. They had been green themselves and still carried

vivid memories of their "breaking in." They understood his trouble. It all sounded so far away and strange. "The big river"—the big chain of rivers—that mysterious natural force which had done for his father. What might it not do to him? He felt as if the men gathered in front of the station were throwing him to the lions, holding a caucus to dispose of his corpse. Keen recollection of the only time he had been face to face with solitude in the Arctic poured over him—that fog-bound drift on the ice cake after the killing of Kak's whale. What terror lurked there! The desperation that had clogged his pulses then flowed back upon him icily. On that fatal day he had nursed his pistol as a last friend and had turned from it to greet his saviors with a joke. Again his agile wit leaped to hide his fear. He addressed the sergeant:

"I'm awfully obliged to you, sir, for the lift in the boat. Do you think she will be big enough to carry my gamekeeper, too?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Hoarse throats made the welkin ring.

"Good boy, Gerry!"

"One on you, Fists!"

"He ought to row you to Macpherson for that."

"He sure ought! Ha, ha!"

"What about Kak? They won't be no room for both of us. Ain't you goin' along, Kak? You're always wantin' to see the world?"

"Of course," Kak answered quietly.

Tears leaped to Gerry's eyes. He brushed them aside under cover of the twilight. What a differ-

ence those two quiet words made to the whole scheme! Instead of a lone, cold, menacing trek, the journey ahead suddenly leaped into the full glory of adventure. To follow his father's footsteps down to the big river—what a lark it would be, companioned. What a lark they would make of it!

Down to the big river. Down to the big river. The rhythm of romance sang in its flowing—down to the big river! The unknown lay before them. This time it would be the unknown for Kak also. Courage quailed a little at that thought. Heretofore Kak had stood behind adventure like a rock. Now—— "But what he doesn't know I will know," Gerry reassured himself. His fancy was running riot again. He longed to get away and talk things over.

The Eskimo felt equally excited. Indians and rapids and Rampart House! They made a delicious jumble in anticipation. Kak had known Indians. He did not fear them, but a certain apprehension of his people's natural enemy hung about the curtain of his mind. On the other hand he grinned to think that he would be financing this trip. He would be hiring these red men to carry his pack, to build his raft. He was as anxious as Gerry to steal away and talk and talk.

They didn't quite know how to break out of the admiring group, so the police sergeant's "Better turn in, boys, and get some sleep. The boat will be ready for you early," came as a relief.

## CHAPTER IX

### ALUNAK SINGS THE DEATH SONG

ALUNAK sat in his tent door exactly as he had been sitting when Gerry and Kak came down the mountain. He had watched then as he was watching now. The old man spent much of his time watching and thinking.

Presently a single traveler appeared around the side of the hill. He was bent under a backload of meat, but still assumed gigantic proportions as he drew near.

Alunak gave a satisfied grunt and rose to set the cooking pot over the fire. He welcomed his mate's return with the same feeling as a child, who has been very good, counts upon the approbation of the parents it loves. He looked forward with childish glee to the moment of springing his surprise. That box of ammunition left by the boys ought to put One-Eyed Nick into roaring good humor for a long time.

The newcomer strode up, dumped the caribou off his shoulders, tossed a couple of caribou tongues to Alunak, and straightened his back. He threw out his chest, filling his lungs with air, drawing his arms up at the elbows. A second's pleasant rigidity

marked release from his task, then all his muscles flexed again.

"That'll keep the wolf from the door for a while, old scout," he said in a loud, metallic voice.

Standing erect the man was colossal—middle-aged, with iron-gray hair, a bull neck, arms and legs like a gladiator's, and a torso lithe and springy and full of strength as a lion's. His face had a cast of Jack Dempsey's face before the renovation—the same square jaw, the same snub nose. But one of the beetling brows was drawn low over an empty eye socket. One-Eyed Nick they called the man wherever they saw him up and down the Arctic coast. The trading stations saw him seldom. Nick lived off the land. His clothes and his food came from the same source, that million or two "wild deer" that Monkey Fists had bragged about. The sole needs he had from outside were ammunition and tobacco, which he got in return for the skins of the foxes he trapped during the winter.

In summer Nick and his Eskimo roamed the hills. They had been together for years. The old native felt an affection for the white man who furnished him with home and food. Nick, on his side, found the alliance very convenient. Alunak made good clothes. He was a fine cook. He journeyed contentedly when and where he was told. Moreover he knew the prospector's secret—how the white man walked up and down over the hills looking for treasure, buried treasure, a fabulous fortune. They had been at it for more years that Alunak could reckon, and still Nick would not give up. The mountain

lay somewhere in these hinterlands. The very caribou they fed on might have rapped its hardness with their hoofs. White men's boots might have planted scars along its snow shroud in the winters or Indians left barefoot tracks upon its summer growth.

Alunak knew what his mate was after. Faithfully he had followed the white man year in and year out, pitching his tent and building his fires. Of late One-Eye had found the old fellow less "nimble on his pins," so now they made a comfortable camp from which the owner would ramble off for a week at a time—south, north, east, west—always hunting. Sometimes it irked him that he had to return instead of pushing on. Alunak was beginning to be a bit of a burden.

"How goes it? You look pretty well pleased with yourself," Nick remarked, when he had filled his stomach with good boiled meat, stretched himself out, and lighted his after-dinner pipe.

The man of few words grinned broadly. The tattoo lines on his cheeks writhed into mirth. He rose, still wordless, and drew an old skin from the ammunition case. He pointed to it proudly.

"Thirty-thirty!"

One-Eye sat up, propped on his elbow. "A whole case of thirty-thirty! How in the dickens did you get that?"

"Visitors. I traded with them."

"Ho! So you've had folks here. Who was it? What were they after?" The metallic voice sounded gruff. He could not blame Alunak for the intrusion,

but it annoyed him. He wanted nobody around his place—nobody anywhere in the hills.

"There was a big storm with much rain and fire from the clouds. They came in wet and went out dry. And they traded me this case. A very good trade?"

Nick laughed. "Good trade. A knockout! But, holy smoke, what did you trade for it? They must have wanted something pretty badly to part with a thousand rounds. What did you give them? Some of your old junk?" He pointed to the tool bag.

Alunak had lighted his pipe also. The reek of caribou hair and tobacco smoke together filtered through the tent. He was happy.

"Not my good tools, no indeed! They are useful. I traded to them your old short gun—no use at all." The native chuckled away down inside himself. He looked to his mate for praise. But Nick's brows were drawn together. His single eye gleamed like an angry Cyclops'. His mouth had taken on a sulky droop.

"That old Colt .45! Why in blazes did you meddle with that? How did they come to see the thing? I swear I'd forgotten all about it. I ought to have buried it long ago." The voice changed on the last two sentences. Reminiscence blended with wonder at his carelessness. His eye still glared. His tight-lipped mouth curved downward like a bow to its string.

Alunak knew the temper signs. Full of apprehension, he began to explain Kak's curiosity, the

looks exchanged over the piece of jade, and the scene following Gerry's discovery of the revolver. From his first elation the old man had fallen into a mollifying tone.

At the finish One-Eye swung both feet off the low bed of piled skins and sat up wrathfully. "They wanted it so bad they gave a thousand rounds—eh!"

"A thousand rounds is much ammunition. A very good trade," Alunak wound up in a shaky voice.

"You bet your blankety, blankety life it's much ammunition! They wanted the old gun badly. But what did they want it for? I suppose you hadn't wit enough to ask yourself that. Who in blazes were these fellows, anyway? What were they like? Young or old, natives or white men?"

"Two boys—one Eskimo. He spoke the Nagyuktok Eskimo dialect, from the far east, and English. The white man saw writing on the gun and grabbed it quick."

"Jerusalem!"

Tense silence fell in the tent. Nick sat with his elbows on his knees, his huge fists hanging down half open between them, his single eye glaring at the case of ammunition. His physical sight was riveted there, while his mental vision strayed back to other scenes.

A large log house, nearly finished, stood proudly in the clearing from which had been hewn its own ribs and roof poles. Bright orange-topped stumps, with sap still oozing from the lacerated wood, encircled the spot, standing close together like a

string of yellow beads, for the wood was thick and the clearing small. A screen of tangled brush grew between house and river. Down there by the water's edge—two hundred yards away—a camp had scrambled into being. Riffraff of all nationalities occupied its tents—specimens of broken and bent humanity, small-souled curs born to be followers. These ate and worked and wrangled on the shore of the broad river down which rafts floated now and then. A boat of sorts was tied to the spot, and several rafts lay half out of water ready to carry the motley gang on down when the "big boss" said the word.

Suddenly in the doorless entrance of the nearly finished house a large man showed himself. He peered out cautiously. Two sound eyes goggled under beetling brows. His face was pale as the under side of poplar leaves. He looked at his hands attentively, turning them palms up and then palms down. He pushed back his sleeves and examined his wrists. He cast one ghastly look over his shoulder and seemed to leap outside, darting away around the patch of bush to the shore.

The large man cried a terrible word as he ran, in a terrible, metallic voice. He sent it before him, arresting the campers at their work. He burst upon them, yelling it hoarsely:

"Smallpox! Smallpox!"

The human beings on that lonely shore recoiled from him.

"Where?"

Alarm rolled as one sound out of many throats, harsh with demand.

"The big boss—there! God save us! The big boss has the plague!"

"The plague. Smallpox. The plague!"

It ran from lip to lip like chain lightning. They did not wait for more. Frying pans were snatched hot from the fires. Tents were struck, pegs yanked up. The canvas fell as if before a hurricane. Yellow dogs that they were, each man thought only of himself. The smartest piled their belongings into the boat. The moorings were cut. Those left behind took to the rafts and pushed out on the slow stream. In a half hour the camp site lay a deserted reach of trampled grass, uprooted trees, charred logs, and rubbish.

The big man, who had been hiding in the woods, came out. He stuck his hands deep into his pockets and regarded the remains with a cynical leer. "Yella bellies!" he muttered. "I knew they'd quit like a bag of rattlesnakes. Bah!" He spat. And with the same horrible smile still scarring his face, he turned on his heel and walked away up the little path, back to the nearly finished house.

A shadow of that leer must have lain like a bar sinister across Nick Martin's face, for Alunak all at once began to reason, to justify himself, in a quick, anxious voice:

"It is all right about the gun. We need the ammunition. That is good medicine. And you do not want these fellows running about in your hills. I told them nothing about the gun. I told them nothing of you. The old weapon, I said, comes from the big river. Now they will go away out

of the hills to hunt on that scent, and there will be no danger of their blocking your hunt for the jade mountain. Alunak is no fool. He did his best. He sent them far afield."

"Like smoke you did!" The prospector's tone was brutal, horrible. Alunak shrank from him.

Eskimos are a proud race. The old man had taken a lot from One-Eye, because he knew that the white man was a good provider. Yet every outburst of Nick's temper had left its sting behind. An accumulation of wounded feeling drove the native into himself. He rose with dignity to set the dinner things aside. Standing before One-Eye, he said in a hurt tone:

"I did right for you. Young men walk nimbly in the mountains. Their bright eyes might notice signs that you miss. So I lied to them—I told them the gun came from the big river——"

Tigerish temper leaped. Nick turned on his mate. His metallic voice shattered the remnants of peace. "And it did come from there, you copper-colored idiot! You told them the livin' truth. Ho! Guarding my secret, were you? Why, that gun's got a secret hanging to it heavier than any millstone. . . . These boys knew something. What for would they pay such a price if they didn't have to have the dashed weapon? A fine mess you've made of things! You've tied a noose around my neck! Save me by sending them to the 'big river'—ha, ha! I killed a man down along that chain of rivers. That's what I did. Killed my pard because he come between me and my ambition. Stabbed

him with a knife till he was dead. And never a word of his secret did I get. Tight mouth! May the 'big river' and all its branches go to perdition! Ha, ha, ha!"

Alunak's wise old eyes never left the face of the jeering, crazed speaker. This was a new man whom he had never known. He had lived with a stranger all these years. He had lived with a murderer.

"It is a good thing to kill sometimes, to kill bad men——" the native began.

"Yah! Cut out that goody-goody talk! I kill those that get in my way, d'ye understand—good or bad!"

One-Eye, sitting on the bed, was almost as tall as the slight Eskimo. Suddenly he thrust his face into Alunak's face. The old man did not flinch. His calmness and his helplessness angered Nick. A great wave of hatred of all human things surged over him. He reared himself up.

"You done me harm, you tin-pot medicine man! You've set the wolves on my track after all these years."

Suddenly a gladiator arm shot out. The hammer fist landed on the side of Alunak's head with a sickening crack, felling him to the tent floor.

One-Eye went berserk. "I'll finish those jackanapes that have my gun!" he roared. "I'll find them in the hills! I'll follow them and smash their heads together like a couple of coconuts. And there's no time like now."

The fear-drunken man reached for his boots across Alunak's body. He cut a hunk from the

caribou, filled his cartridge pouch, and shouldered his rifle. He stooped his great height under the tent door and strode away down the valley straight toward Herschel.

When Alunak recovered consciousness he lay a long time on the floor just as he had fallen. His open eyes stared up at the roof. The diminishing light showed afternoon was fading. Time ebbed; but Alunak had no thought of time. He plotted for eternity. All the small vials of his resentment had burst and rushed together into one vast caldron of anger boiling through his soul.

He knew in the depths of him why Nick had dared to strike like that. He, Alunak the shaman, was growing old. He was a burden. The occasion and the impulse to destroy had come together, and they meant no loss. Staring up at the tent roof, the aged native tried to reconstruct his picture of the white man—this partner whom he had served for years.

He saw against that cold gray concavity a panorama of human lives: Nick, who had been his friend, towered above him, his one eye burning, his face convulsed with evil passion. Nick was pouring forth his wrath, spitting reproaches, tearing his dirty life secret out of his black heart and flaunting it blood-dyed. Nick raised his arm to strike.

Alunak could see the action of that other story also. That story which he had heard for the first time a few hours ago: Two men together in the woods, trusting each other. Two friends bound by a secret. Jealousy springing in between them. Two

men each jealous of the other's power. He saw them like two splendid beasts—dominant, hating. There was a moment when the one bent to his work. and the other came upon him unexpectedly. A single flash of steel, and it was done. The sitting body crumpled down, it overbalanced, and toppled from the bench. It lay dead still—as Alunak had lain.

The old man felt no pity for the fancied victim. His concern was for himself. "He who kills treacherously once, will kill treacherously again." That thought stirred him to action.

"But there are more ways of killing than by the flash of steel," muttered the shaman.

Alunak rose. He felt giddy, yet he forced himself to stand upright. The tent, the dogs, the fire all whirled around as if bewitched. He drank water and waited until his head cleared. Then he selected a long staff from a pile of gear and stepped outside.

It was evening and cloudless. The valley lay full of topaz light like the inside of a honeycomb full of clover honey. Alunak turned to the mountain in front of the tent, and began to climb. He went slowly, for he was old and shaken, but he went steadily up—straight up—till he reached the top.

This was no peak, but the broad forehead of a high hill. Standing there the native saw wide spaces—the rolling crests of other hills—his world. Above, the stars glittered remotely, with the stern intelligence of northern lights—splendid and profuse. The edges of the earth and air merged in one

orange-hued band, a smudgy, lurid rim of sun-discarded color.

The shaman stood very straight. He had journeyed into that high, silent place to do something he had never yet done—something he had always felt he would do. He was about to sing the death song.

The clear distinction of the old man's high-bridged nose was blackly outlined on that fire-bitten field. His solemn eyes shone coldly. The tattoo lines scarring his cheeks—his Victoria Cross, his medals and ribbons of honor, bestowed on him by his people for distinguished bravery—gave to his warrior face a grimmer look than any general has ever worn. He who had killed Indians was now about to kill a white man—a bad man, one who had slain his friend. Alunak might be too old to kill with the knife—but his was the power. He could kill with the sword of song.

The words were in his mind, often and often he had muttered them below his breath. The tune was in his heart. Often he had sighed that solemn chant while sitting in his tent door. But never had he joined those potent words to that all-powerful music. Now the time was ripe.

The old man lifted up his face and in a voice unbelievably smooth and full for his age poured words and notes together into the silent caverns of the night. The pealing, monotonous chant of the death song rolled from his throat, and the vengeance welling in his heart bore it up and out like bitter incense.

"Kill, kill, kill," he intoned to the spirit he knew for his god—"kill my enemy, the white man. He who pretended to be my friend. Slay, slay, slay with the stroke of thy power. Drain the strength from his right arm and frost the heat of his anger in the frost of death. Kill, kill, kill my enemy."

The singing ceased. Night moved close to the hills. The sky was draped in final darkness. All natural things seemed to dissolve and vanish. Only the stars shone brighter and stronger in the dome of the limitless heavens. And the eyes of the old native, looking up, tense with the strength of his will and his limitless hatred, gave them back glitter for glitter.

## CHAPTER X

### ONE-EYE GETS WISE

NICK MARTIN'S rage died down as he trudged through the long afternoon. With the cooling of his temper, reason returned.

This business of going about slaughtering people was all very well in cities like Chicago or New York, where the seething floods of humanity wash out and blend all human stains. But murder takes on a grimmer aspect north of the Arctic Circle. Tales travel more surely where there is much talk about few people. He had got away with one crime. Excitement had frothed through the region in those days, carrying law and order before it like chips. Old Alunak, also, was obscure. If he failed to come to after the crack Nick had given him, probably no one would miss him. But laying hands on the young men, known to have gone out from Herschel, was a different matter. The prospector's mind swung from revenge to caution and back again—revenge caution, caution revenge—like a pendulum. In the end common sense triumphed. He decided to go to Herschel first and find out about these boys and what they wanted with his gun. It is safer to act after one knows.

Slowly the giant form bearing its pack toiled

across the ridges, hurried through the valleys. A cunning smile played on the man's features. Whatever happened, later, it would be a good alibi for him to turn up at the post just now and purchase ammunition. How thoroughly the pretext would dissociate him from that case of thirty-thirty! One-Eye laughed. Alunak had said nothing of him to the strangers. He would return the compliment by saying nothing of Alunak. He would let the world talk. A close tongue and open ears teach a man how to proceed.

Nick's crafty mind was supplemented by a considerable knowledge of human nature. He had shown it years ago when, to cover his crime, he had scared away a crowd of unwelcome witnesses by a smallpox alarm. Now he figured that two boys so excited over acquiring an old revolver would come straight back to their friends to brag of the find. Under cover of the last line of foothills he made a long detour to throw gossiping observers off the track. Herschel must see him arriving from a different direction than that of Alunak's camp. This ruse cost him twenty-four hours' time. Before he reached the post, Kak and Gerry were well on their way in the police boat.

The boys' story, however, lingered behind them. It was still the main subject of conversation. He heard it from the natives who rowed him across to Flanders Point. They described the heavy gun and its silver mounting, and mentioned with awe that Kak, the Copper Eskimo, had started on a long journey through the heart of the Indian country.

"There's not a thing that fellow won't do—not a single thing!"

Nick, impatient of their admiration, said good-by and hurried up the steep path leading over the island height to the harbor. He heard the story from a "Mounty" met on the way. A different story this: It seemed a curly-headed youth had turned a joke on Monkey Fists, and the boys had rubbed it in until the sailor-trapper had consented to take charge of the boat going to Macpherson. The whole thing was a rare joke around the station.

He had the bone and sinews of the tale from McGuire when he went to get his ammunition.

"Queer thing the old shooting iron turning up in a native's tool bag, there in the hills, so many years after!

"We can't place the Eskimo, either. I thought at first it might be the fellow that hangs about with you." McGuire looked Nick straight in his one eye.

The trapper met that probing glance unflinchingly.

"Haven't got any native now," he said. "They come and go. What was the old chap called? I might have met him."

"Alunak."

The prospector was lighting his pipe. His hands did not falter. He held the match over the bowl, gave two or three sucking puffs, and then shook his head. "Never heard of him—except that Alunak is a common name."

That night while a game of stud poker was going

forward in the police station, he heard the story from another angle. The customary exaggeration of sums and property concerned in any wild romance was already booming. Gerry's fortune had assumed gigantic proportions. Tales of his father's fabulous wealth—his inflated magnificence—had become hopelessly mixed with the report of the uncle's estate.

"I tell you the man had a solid gold bathtub with a jewuled do-daddy hanging on one edge fer his cigarette ash, and another on the other side fer the soap. The taps had jewuls as big as hickory nuts in their tops to tell 'em apart—one red, a ruby, see, and one green, a emerald—hot and cold. Strike me dead if it ain't so!"

"Red fer boilin' danger an' green fer cold safety."

They all laughed. Other voices took up the tale.

"Come two months Yeller Head will be settin' up atop a coach, drivin' the six teams of six horses left him by his unc. True talk! I'm tellin' ye. They've got pictures of it all drawed out on skins that the boy Kak left wid McGuire. If ye don't believe me ye can ask Mac."

"My grief! We've been humbugging about here with a multimillionaire—and him too young to set up the drinks! Ain't it Paddy from Cork's own luck!"

That was the way the talk ran. Millions, billions, gold and glory for blue-eyed Gerry—all hinging on time and the old gun.

Nick Martin had never been one to fraternize. He left the station shortly and turned in for a

sound, much-needed sleep. With the first streak of dawn he was off, going circuitously as he had arrived.

His vengeance lust had yielded wholly to a plot for gain. The gilded youth, alive and grateful, would be an asset. Dead he would rank as liability. So Nick magnanimously decided to let him live and pay. He saw himself selling his knowledge of Cuthbert Raikes to an adoring son, or, better still, conducting the boys to that nearly finished house on the Porcupine River, telling the story of his pal's tragic death, his desertion by all but a single stanch friend. If he could manage to wring a few crocodile tears out of his one eye the pathos would be complete!

Nick saw himself taken to England and living there in ease and great state, occupying the position of a second father to the young heir—being all that the boy's own father might have been—particularly in his ability to spend.

All his life the one-eyed giant had dreamed of himself as a potentate, an exquisite, a blend of sybarite and epicure. A temperamental sympathy had first established the bond between him and Cuthbert Raikes. Time proved they were too much alike. The shrewd northerner had been ill-contented to play second fiddle, and it was against nature for Raikes to acknowledge any absolute equality. Nick's jealousy of his more lustrous friend had led to bloodshed. But even that failed to curb his love of splendor. He had risked keeping the silver-mounted gun because of the thrill it gave him to handle the sumptuous thing. He had envied

wealth from his boyhood. He had trudged through the mountains seeking treasure all the best years of his life—and now it looked as if his chance offered.

The man gave a huge laugh as he turned his face to the tundra and opportunity. His head was bare. His shirt lay open at the neck, and his chest, broad and hairy, courted the sun's rays. The pack on his back seemed a featherweight. For him to navigate the hill country was child's play.

He would walk right south to the river, heading the boys off on their long, slow raft voyage. He would camp and watch for them as they passed. Hail them. Make friends. And later induct them into a glamorous tale of devotion and sacrifice. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Cuthbert Raikes used to read that out of a small Bible he carried, for he had a queer religious streak in him. "Lay down his life"—ha, ha! A fellow who stayed behind to nurse an infectious sickness came pretty near doing it. The boys would see that—he'd make 'em see it! Lucky they were young. "It's easy to work on a kid's soft heart," he muttered.

The sinister grin died from One-Eye's face as he remembered Alunak. After all, somebody might go looking for the Eskimo's tent. Some of Craig's crew, perhaps. Curiosity works queerly on idle men, and McGuire had been uncommonly interested.

The prospector decided to take a look at his old camp. Diverting his course, he struck up the familiar valley. His steps paced more and more slowly.

The thought of murder holds a rancid flavor to a cool mood. Nick felt afraid of his own unchained strength and its possible consequences.

"It sure was a tarnation hard knock I gave the old charm singer," he allowed guiltily. He walked head down when approaching the camp and scarcely dared to enter the tent for fear of what he might see.

To his amazement the place was deserted. Alunak and his three dogs had disappeared. The bed skins were gone and the tool bag. The native had taken his own share—the equivalent of his possessions when they had joined forces so many years ago. The tent was Nick's gear. All his things, and particularly the case of ammunition which had been traded for his revolver, were piled, with conspicuous honesty, in the middle of the floor.

One-Eye rubbed the back of his head, pondering. He could hardly believe this. "Well, at least I'm glad I didn't do his old Nibs in," he muttered. But somehow dread and foreboding mingled with relief. Or was it a sense of shame?

"Fancy the old bird lighting out after our being so long together! Don't half like it. Don't know what he may do. I shouldn't have told about that knife thrust. Shouldn't nobody ever *talk,* by gum! Maybe I ought to have hit him harder—stopped his yap."

Beside the trickle of fear running through Nick's mood, he was experiencing the chill of homelessness. Fire and food had always been ready for him, but here was nothing a man could call home. . . .

"Well!"

Suddenly he threw out his chest and laughed a long rolling peal like thunder. A vision of his future with Gerry had rushed upon him. It soothed the pride wounded by Alunak's desertion.

"Maybe to a middle-aged fella like me a son will come more natural than a grandpa," he chortled.

Happy as a lark, Nick began to move about sorting the place. He worked quickly and expertly. The tent came down. A cache above the reach of bears and wolves was fashioned from its poles. The cartridge box and all his old belongings, wrapped in the canvas, were hoisted up on the cache platform and securely lashed with stout caribou thongs.

"Looks shipshape," the traveler pronounced.

He loaded up with all the meat that Alunak had left, for not having to hunt would save him time. And as there were still several hours before twilight, he turned his face to the south.

# CHAPTER XI

## KANIK GROWS OVERBOLD

"We felled an India-rubber tree,
And made a big canoe,
About the shape and pattern
Of a number twenty shoe.

"Roll, boys! Roll!
Never mind the weather.
No matter how the wind blows,
We'll all get there together!"

GERRY sang for the sheer joy of singing, and his shipmates did not throw him overboard. Though Kak and the Eskimo crew failed to understand the fine points of his chantey, they grinned appreciation, while Monkey Fists came in strong on the chorus, making the most of the round vowels:

"ROLL, boys! ROLL!
Never mind the weather.
No matter how the wind BLOWS,
We'll all get there together!"

Their voices might well raise a salty song, for the wind was blowing steadily out of the right quarter, and the police boat danced on a sparkling sea with her canvas taut and her gunwale far over to leeward.

It was a day of shimmer and shine. Old Sol's smiles came welcome now that they alternated with dusky nights. The ocean smelt delicious after those inland weeks breathing the dry air flung back from grass and lichens, deadened with the perfume of late autumn flowers. To be borne along at no effort to one's self beat hunting all hollow, Gerry thought; and he bellowed his exultation, moving swiftly toward his goal, carefree as a tern:

"The steward hove the lead o'erboard.
'Twas three feet deep, no more,
And every mother's son of us
Got out and walked ashore.

"ROLL, boys! ROLL——"

The young baritone sang his way sturdily through the full length of the sea bard's narrative. When the final line had been rendered he began to improvize, but they howled him down. So he started "Roll, boys!" again, in the middle, and sang all the verses backward to the first one. The chorus was good for a half dozen "Rolls" every time. Thus the day wore on.

"Our breeze is slackening," Fists said at last, his hand sensitive to the feel of the sheet.

Soon it was obvious. The boat righted slowly as her speed lessened, until they were barely gliding through the water on an even keel.

"For'ard, there! Whistle a bit fer wind, lad. Pipe up the clouds."

Kak, who was in the bow, looked sheepish. Eskimos do not know how to whistle. Wanting to

do all that white men do he had made desperate efforts to learn, but with slight success. It is necessary to show one's self good-humored over the digs of a professional humorist like Monkey Fists, however. So he pursed his lips and sent the breath through them with a faint sound like escaping steam.

"Davy Jones! Listen to our siren! Fog bank on the lee bow. Hard up the helm. Keep her off."

"Quit it, Fists! You'll bring us bad luck. She's scarcely moving now. We ought to stay in the boat and sail all night to catch up."

McGuire's story of how long it took to send news out of the Arctic had prodded Gerry into apprehension. He was strung, tense, anxious whenever he recollected his errand, and he fretted at the least delay.

"No, you don't!" the older sailor replied. "We're going to camp at King Point. I'm minded to run in alongside the *Bonanza* and have several hours' solid sleep. There'll be wind a-plenty by midmorning, to-morrow."

Gerry made no objections. The mention of the wreck brought him around. Few romantic souls can ignore the claims of an abandoned ship. He could see her keeled over, her tapering masts fixed at a tragic angle, her deck bleached like a bone. The Celt immediately commenced to weave fancies about her, although he knew the whole story.

The *Bonanza* dated back to 1905. She had been a "spouter" doing her bit at the whaling in the waters east of the Mackenzie River. It proved to

be a bad year—1905—and late in the summer when trying to get west the little ship had been caught in the ice at King Point. She was so damaged that the captain decided to abandon her and went "out," leaving his second mate Chris Sten to salvage the cargo.

While Sten put in a strenuous winter in the Arctic over this work, serious things were happening at home. Somebody invented a manufactured substitute for whalebone, and suddenly the bottom dropped out of the market. Bone went down from four dollars a pound to twenty-five cents a pound. The price afterward rose a little, but never enough to make Arctic ship whaling pay, though the natives continued it. In consequence the owners of the *Bonanza* did not bother to salvage their ship. Her gear and her cargo became Sten's property by default. For twelve months while he stuck to her, eating up and giving away her stores, and disposing of other things, he was a popular fellow. King Point is a poor place to settle down, however, so eventually Sten, tiring of his kingdom, brought into service the *Penelope,* a beautiful ship of which he had been given command. She was partly owned by his Eskimo brothers-in-law and had once been one of the finest pleasure yachts on the Pacific coast. Built for speed, with ten tons of lead on her keel, she could outsail anything in Arctic waters. In this queen of crafts he removed to Shingle Point the rest of the discarded whaler's gear.

For years the poor *Bonanza* had lain with her nose stuck into the beach, all drifted deep with

sand. Her hull, pointing a little east of north, formed a tiny harbor on her port bow. The nook was well known to travelers passing along that dangerous shore as a safe anchorage in a moderate sea. But when tempests raged, the waves broke over her, submerging her almost continuously, and the "harbor" seethed like a whirlpool at the bottom of a waterfall.

"If you hadn't suggested the *Bonanza* I would have," Kak said. "I want to go inland and have a look around. You may come along, Kanik, and stretch your legs."

He leaned over to pat the dog sleeping at his feet. Both felt cramped in the whaleboat. They were the first to spring out on the beach, and immediately after dinner they struck off for the promised walk.

Steady going up grade for a quarter of a mile brought them to the highlands, maybe three hundred feet above sea level. Here the native stopped to study the sky and ascertain the likelihood of wind to-morrow, while the pup trotted away, nose to the ground, sniffing for the little Arctic prairie dogs which scientists call spermophiles.

Kak strolled westward. From thinking of weather signs he began to think about jade and the long journey they were about to make into the unknown. Time flitted by. The sun had set hours earlier. Darkness approached. It would, on the whole, be better to sleep, the native decided, and turned to look for Kanik. He saw a gray form pacing across the meadow, took it for his dog, and called. Instead

of bounding toward him the creature sprang away. Ah, a wolf—nervous like all wolves in these settled parts—running at a sound.

Kak looked after the wolf indifferently. Its pelt must be worthless at this time of year, his rifle was in camp, and as they had plenty of food there was no sense in killing the beast. Still, its presence made him slightly uneasy. He called Kanik again and was glad to see the dog bound out of a hollow. For any wolf streaking around King Point at that time of year was apt to be a very hungry wolf, and a small dog like Kanik would have about as much chance against a large, powerful, hungry wolf as a seal in the paws of a polar bear.

The Eskimo kept Kanik at heel on the way home and was happily conscious of a muzzle touching the back of his legs once in a while. Finally he relented and allowed his pet to slide a cold nose into his curved fingers. This was one of their chummy attitudes. In the Arctic, if anywhere, a dog is a man's best friend.

Kak and Kanik loved each other. They had never been separated except once, when the pup accompanied Avranna and Taktuk on their quick journey north to warn Omialik of the plot against him. All of which is another story written in *The Shaman's Revenge.* Kak would not have undertaken the present adventure with Gerry if he had been forced to leave his pet behind. The dog was a good sailor. He did exactly the right thing in a boat—lay down and kept quiet. He would be useful in helping carry the load across the mountains.

"But I don't know how you'll take to the raft, old boy," his master whispered to him frequently. Perhaps Kak was just a little apprehensive of the raft himself.

They struck the beach to westward and came down on a silent camp. Evidently their shipmates had all turned in. Evening thickened. The eastern heaven was shaded delicately as a seashell from the reflected sunset, and the disk of the full moon looked like a piece of tinfoil skewered to the sky by one of the *Bonanza's* rakish masts.

The Eskimo put Kanik to bed—that is, he watched him sniff the larder, a joint of fresh caribou rolled in canvas, and then settle down in the sheeny twilight, between sunfade and moonshine, with nose on paws. The master entered his tent and in two minutes was fast asleep.

Now the uninterrupted night began to talk to its denizens. The regular harsh rushing and intermittent silences of waves breaking on the beach drowned out Fists' snores. A yellow-billed loon screamed ghoulishly in the distance and was answered by the dismal note of the short-eared owl. Snow geese called "Ka-ngok, ka-ngok" to each other, and stealthy footsteps padded by.

Kak was right in his conjecture that a wolf at King Point in August would be a hungry wolf, making his living on spermophiles mostly, for the caribou were far inland. The lone beast scouting across the prairie had followed them from curiosity. On the way he was joined by his mate. Inside their nest a few miles off lay three young pups—beauti-

ful replicas of father wolf—strong-limbed, but scrawny. Too scrawny. It was a whole hungry wolf family. The pups were still too young to hunt, and the food scarcity kept both the grown wolves hustling day and night. Kanik's scent they took for the scent of another wolf. It might lead to some kill. Hopefully they followed it down the long slope to the sea.

They found it hot scent all the way, and the smell at the other end—the smell of fresh caribou—was simply intoxicating to half-famished wolves. They loped in on soft pads quietly, timidly, yet swiftly, for the odor was strong. They hesitated at the camp's edge. That reeking man scent put them off. But the caribou meat shrieked of full bellies, food for their pups, and the sweet sleep of repletion. At last mother wolf ventured into the charmed circle. The aroma of the fresh meat drew her on.

She shoved her long, gray nose near the canvas-covered meat and sniffed. It was only the dim ghost of a sound, that sniff, but enough to wake the night watchman. Kanik thrust up his nose and sniffed, too. Enemy scent! Murder and thieves! All at once the hair on the dog's shoulders stood out like a ruff of thin wires. He opened his jaws and gave one yap that caused the marauder to stop, look, and listen.

A sense of guilt made her leap away from the joint. Kanik saw the fear in that movement and went for it, with lowered head, swiftly, out of the tent shadows into the bright, moon-flooded space. His shadow, springing at his side, looked like a

second dog. The suddenness of the attack proved too much for hunger-strained nerves. Mother wolf fell back to her mate.

Kanik, rash pup, emboldened by her retreat, dashed after her, barking—calling Kak, doing his best to rouse the camp.

"Yap, yap, yap!"

Kanik's voice, sharp and high, and then the deep-lunged bark of the wolf—or maybe it was a laugh. Mother wolf's fangs showed in a frightful, self-satisfied grin. This swift destruction that had shot at her out of the gloom was only a dog—a smallish Eskimo dog! Over his head she could see bright eyes gleaming as father wolf closed in on the other side. She began to move around Kanik, playing with her opportunity.

"Yip, yap, yap, yip!"

Each sound came tenser and sharper than the last. When Kanik glimpsed the second wolf he felt the moments of his life were numbered, yet he was game to the end. Like a diamond, the fighting heart ranks not on its size but on its quality.

"Yip, yip!" The slender-boned jaws went snap, snap, here and there. Kanik danced like a dervish, back and forth, right and left, snapping in every direction, while the wolves circled slowly around him, gloating over their prey.

Kak had been sleeping lightly, his mind disturbed by that shadowy form he had seen up on the prairie. Kanik's first yap crashed into his dream—a fulfillment of its worst threat. The boy knew instantly what was up. He knew how quickly a wolf leaps,

how deadly sure it strikes. His breath stopped with fear for his pet, but his muscles obeyed. In two bounds he was out of bed and through the door. He caught up a cartridge pouch, the only thing at hand, and bursting into the moonlight with a wild yell, flung the heavy thing at the enemy.

Smack it fell on the ground, right under father wolf's nose. He shied away, and frightened by the noise as well, sprang up the grassy slope.

The whole camp was roused. Monkey Fists darted from the other tent, gun in hand. He fired at mother wolf who was streaking away after her mate, but failed to get her in the glimmering light. Gerry, struggling into his shirt, was yelling. The Eskimo crew yelled. In the middle of this pandemonium Kak turned to admonish his pup.

"You silly little fool," he said. "What for did you attack a wolf all by your lonesome? Were you defending the camp—acting the hero? Well, it isn't up to you to defend anything. It's your job to waken *me.*" The speaker pounded his own chest vigorously. "Next time you waken *me,* and I'll do all the defending necessary—understand?"

Kanik hung his head and drooped his tail for all the world as if he did understand. To him those cross words were the worst part of a hideous experience. He slunk close and tried to rub against his master's bare legs, but all the encouragement he got was:

"You're a bad, bold dog. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for giving us such a scare."

So they crossed the camp circle—the dog humble and his master shivering.

"I'll keep watch for a while. They may return," Gerry suggested nervously.

"Get to your bed and sleep. The wolves are the skertist of the lot of us." Monkey Fists, who hated being roused from his sleep, turned to his own tent sulkily.

It was more than unlikely the wolves would come back, hungry though they were. Just the same Kak brought Kanik inside with him. He made the dog lie at his feet as he snuggled among the bed skins. He dug his big toes under the heavily breathing body with a happy sense of security, touched by that extra tenderness which overflows in us for any of our dear possessions that we have nearly lost.

## CHAPTER XII

### CROW TAIL'S CONSCIENCE, OR INDIAN ARITHMETIC

"ME big, strong fella—me carry big load." The Indian Jim Joe—named by his own people Crow Tail—broadcasted his virtues with smiling reassurance. He was certainly big and he looked strong, but a practiced eye would have noted at once that he was overweight for a strenuous porter.

Gerry's blue eye was far from efficient in judgment. It beamed good nature. He glanced from the smooth-faced "savage" to his third porter, an extraordinarily dark-skinned Indian, with a thick crop of black hair, cut short as a Prussian officer's, standing out all over his head like wire. This man backed up his red brother's advice:

"Take plenty corned beef. Take plenty bacon. Him good on trail."

"Right you are!" cried the young adventurer. "I don't know anything that tastes better than ham and flapjacks in the woods. I'll buy all the pork you boys are willing to carry. We won't have a thing to do going down the river but cook and eat and sleep."

Gerry, absolutely in his glory, centered the attention of the trading post. He stood, legs straddled,

hands plunged deep into his pockets, and face wreathed in smiles, while all about him eddied activity on his behalf.

McTaggart, the agent, was weighing sugar and rice himself, and parceling for transportation. Cans of preserves, molasses, and meat made a little pyramid on the floor. Coils of rope to be used in raft building lay near these. A hammer, several axes, a tin kettle instead of a teapot, sides of bacon, and a sack of flour were all marked for the Raikes party. The finer portion of their goods lay on the counter—tobacco, since the porters must smoke, cartridges for Gerry's revolvers old and new. Topping all was a gorgeous display of silk handkerchiefs, many-hued as Joseph's coat. These, the agent had explained, they should carry to use instead of money. They would come in handy to pay Indians encountered en route for services that might be rendered.

Such an idea appealed naturally to the Raikes temperament. Gerry had adorned himself with the gayest handkerchief of the lot knotted about his neck. Another flashed a cocky ear from his flannel breast pocket. It was almost like being back in civilization. He had bestowed one on Kak, which the native wore impatiently under his old fur smock. The temperature was about eighty, and he saw no sense in adding a hot neck string to his dress.

Kak for the moment had fallen from his high estate as guide, philosopher, and friend. He had been relegated to a back seat and from there was

amazedly watching the goings-on around him. The quantities of food and supplies made him gape.

"But the woods are full of game. We will have fresh meat," he had objected in the early stages of the corned-beef argument.

"Won't have time to stop and hunt," Gerry had answered tersely.

"Indeed ye will not!" McTaggart interjected. "You'll have to float pretty continuously day and night to make Eagle on time. The Bell River is full of joukery-pawkery. Nobody ever knows how she'll be acting. It looks like a season of low, slow water, for we've had little rain. I don't half like the notion of you two boys undertaking the trip alone. Low water means dangerous rapids."

"But we've no choice now!" Kak sounded chilled.

"Poor talk, poor talk! Don't let 'em depress you, kid. Faint heart never won fair fortune," Monkey Fists had said, turning to Gerry. "Take your chance and grab them money bags. Believe me, your uncle's last words is worth the risk."

"I ain't conspicuously depressed, am I?" the sailor asked, laughing.

Time appeared the great factor in the case, and Raikes unconsciously played up to his part. Men who had been strangers a few hours earlier were hurrying and scurrying to get him packed and off. What could a fellow do but be his most agreeable and encourage help by open-handed appreciation? He did not mean to crowd his pal out, but everything had to be decided quickly, and Kak seemed

overcome by strangeness since they first sighted the place.

The look of the post alone was foreign to an Eskimo. Macpherson is perched atop a hundred and fifty foot bank on the east side of the Peel River. The entire district was originally covered with heavy spruce forests and these still hem it around, though there is plenty of elbowroom in the clearing, for ambitious white men once grew potatoes here and kept a cow. Both signs of civilization had passed long before the boys' visit. That Kak regretted. He would have been as interested in seeing a cow as the average United States boy would be thrilled by meeting a polar bear face to face on Main Street.

The forest also spread all over the lowlands to the west, through which they were going, and halfway up the mountain ridge. What mystery might it not hold! The native of the shaven North, those prairie coast lands, felt choked when he contemplated several weeks walking and drifting among silent, close-set trees.

Although he had known Indians, he had never seen them at home. And the numbers of them here gave his spine a creepy feeling. He eyed that "big, strong fella," Crow Tail, with misgiving, and thought secretly that he and Gerry would be only two against three while in the forest with their porters. *Their* porters! Pride made his blood run faster. He was immensely tickled over his position as employer. He heard Gerry explaining it to McTaggart.

"That will be eighty pounds each for the men to carry, thirty for the little dog, and forty each for me and Kak. He's my partner in this, you know. We're paying fifty-fifty and its share and share alike in everything."

McTaggart frowned. "I think you're inviting trouble. It's according to regulations that your load should be lighter, but the Indians see the distinction between white men and natives clearer than they do between employer and employees. They'll kick if the Eskimo travels light."

"Let 'em kick," said Gerry loftily.

"It isn't as if I could recommend these fellows you're hiring. If you'd come two weeks earlier the whole crowd was in here for trading and you might have had your pick. But now—well, Jim Joe's as good as any of them, and Scotty is a dandy little worker—if he doesn't cough."

At mention of Scotty, Raikes sank the discussion in a big laugh. The second porter, having lived in and about Hudson Bay posts all his life, had learned his fluent English largely from Scotch factors and he spoke with a broad accent. The mere idea of an Indian talking with a burr struck Gerry as comical. Everything the man said amused him and he hired Scotty, in spite of a warning that he was far from strong.

When exterior circumstances are running smoothly seems to be the time that our inner natures play us false. Kak listened to this conversation and deliberated. Common sense prompted him to bid McTaggart divide the four loads evenly. But pride put

up a mighty fight for its first taste of power. He kept silent.

In the course of a few hours purchases were made and preparations completed. They stood ready to start. Leave-taking was a cheery business all around. The whole place turned out to bid the boys good luck, for their story was a first-class romance, and Monkey Fists had seen to it that the tale lost nothing in the telling.

The little party crossed the river in a boat lent by McTaggart, Fists going along to see them safely off. He helped the young heir adjust his pack with fatherly solicitude, standing back as if to admire the effect, his head on one side and his strong hands clutching his hips.

"A few jewuls would have improved it," he said regretfully, eyeing the tumpline that spanned Gerry's forehead. "But when ye return will be time enough for full regalia. Young fella me lad, if ye ever again show your face north of the Arctic Circle we'll expect some jollification."

"And you'll have it, you bet you will—every last one of you! The Arctic crowd have been white to me from start to finish. Thank the boys, will you——"

Gerry was shaking the whaler's red, hairy fists. His voice quavered.

"Get on with you! I was only jokin'. Step lively now, or that lazy good-for-nothing of a Jim Crow will be leavin' you behind."

Neither of the boys felt like talking during the first few miles of their portage. The wave of excite-

ment that had been carrying them on its crest gradually subsided. The path lay through the forest, with tolerably good going. Kak's thoughts were all of the land ahead. The mystery of these thick trees already compelled him. He imagined fighting among them, hiding, creeping on an enemy out of their shadows, dodging from cover to cover. Gerry stalked ahead of the Indians, but the Eskimo walked behind them. The way they were strung out in line reminded him of Omialik marching the three strangers into camp at the point of his gun, just before that dreadful time when Noashak was lost. He shivered a little. Kak still retained enough fear of Indians as a whole to make every minute of this journey a living thrill.

Gerry, having unbottled his emotion in parting and drenched Monkey Fists with sentiment, was now feeling very practical. He checked up on their schedule. The police boat had taken only three days making its way from Herschel to Macpherson. That was a gain of two days over the best time heretofore known. In another four days they would be across the mountains. McTaggart had estimated fifteen days down river—two weeks living on a raft. Romance with a big R, all right!

The brain under the mop of curly yellow hair was still busily adding and subtracting hours, when the path debouched on a camp site. Gerry walked straight ahead and was just entering the trees again as Kak hailed him. He turned about and stared.

Crow Tail had stopped and was lowering his pack. The other Indians followed his example.

"Hi, there! What are you doing?" The white man asked.

"Make camp here," answered the laconic "savage."

"Here? Stop here? Nonsense! Why, we've barely started. Come on you—all of you."

"No. Camp here. To-morrow plenty big walk—big climb. To-morrow plenty work for big, strong fella. To-night, rest here."

"But, I say! This is a washout! What'll we do, Kak?"

Kak remembered Omialik's firmness with the Indians. "I think we will all have to go on," he said, looking very straight at Crow Tail.

The redskin smiled. "Very good. You go on. We go back. No place camp site ahead. No fit place stop inside one whole day travel. Stay here now and to-morrow walk big walk——"

"But listen, you cheerful idiot. This isn't any picnic party. We're going somewhere. We've got to do this 'plenty big walk' in four little days—see?"

"Fient a haet! This wee bit startie disna count for a day at a'," Scotty suddenly interpolated.

Raikes' face relaxed. "Whit way dis it na count?" he demanded, mimicking the Indian's broad Scotch.

The third porter answered, "This same day you come from Herschel. We start plenty time. We make little start for big walk. To-morrow we begin four-day tramp. We no count little bit short time same day you come."

"Oh, have it your own blooming way!" Gerry groaned and threw off his pack. Then to Kak, "We

don't count to-day, but I guess we pay for it just the same."

The Indians all grinned approval of this sentiment. They commenced to make camp industriously.

Raikes sat down and indulged in gloom. "It doesn't matter about their wages, because I promised the boys each thirty-five dollars for the trip—if they hurried—instead of their regulation four dollars a day. I thought I was paying them a little more than double. But if they 'no count little bit short time,' why the bonus isn't so big—that's all. Just the same it sets us back a day on our schedule."

"Oh, well, we'll win through. We left extra days at the end."

"Yes, but we've got to have a margin against accident. We don't know how long we will have to wait for a boat at Fort Yukon."

That was to be the burden of Gerry's song from now on. His voice sounded testy. Still, as he had made all the arrangements, he had no one to blame but himself. Kak wisely remained silent and allowed the white man to regain his good temper. By supper time he had cheered up and everybody enjoyed the meal, only poor Scotty began to cough. Instead of chipping in on the jokes and stories and talk, he sat struggling for his breath.

Next day opened with a regrettable incident. Crow Tail, who was cook, had cut many thick slices of bacon and piled them on the end of a log where he left them while he went to fetch the frying pan. Kanik roaming around in his usual fit condition—

that is, with keen scent and keener appetite—came sniffing at the tasty strips of pig.

Unfortunately Crow Tail saw the dog out of the corner of his eye and did not wait for him to steal. Swinging around he hurled the first handy missile—the large sharp-edged frying pan, straight at him. Kanik could see out of the corner of his eye, too. He jumped, but not quick enough. The pan, hurtling with all the force of the "big, strong fella's" right arm, landed handle down and gave him a jab on the back so that he yelped with pain.

Instantly Kak thrust his head and shoulders out of the tent door. Neither question nor explanation was needed. The tableau, there where latticed sunlight sifted down through spruce trees, spoke for itself. Crow Tail's attitude, the cowering dog, and the dinted pan lying bottom up told what was to the Eskimo a tale of wanton cruelty.

The Loucheux Indians are notoriously as careless of their animals as the Copper Eskimos are kind to theirs. In all his years of work and travel Kanik had never even been touched with a whip. As for throwing sharp-edged implements—that was the way Kak treated wolves!

The outraged owner gave Jim Joe one baleful look and called his dog. Kanik's yelp and the clatter of the falling pan had attracted everybody's attention. Curious faces turned toward the scene.

"Him steal," Crow Tail said to Gerry, shrugging.

"He does not steal. Kanik knows better than to steal. You wait until he does something wrong before you punish my dog—or I'll punish you!"

Kak bent to examine the wounded back. "I'll murder that Indian, yet," he muttered under his breath, but not too low for his partner's hearing.

"Lay off it, Kak. You're an employer. You mustn't quarrel with the men. Leave me to settle this business."

The Eskimo reacted to that reminder of his new dignity. Without a word or glance he turned back into the tent to get some iodine for his pet. He did not wait to hear what Gerry said to the Indian and from that time on he took no further notice of him.

Breakfast passed in moody silence, and silently the camp was struck. Kak walked ahead now with Gerry next and Crow Tail bringing up the rear.

The partners marched in silence, but very soon talk broke out among the porters. It sounded far from pleasant even in a foreign language. Jim Joe was cussing Kak liberally in Loucheux. He pointed out how the Eskimo was carrying next to nothing, while they panted over "niggerheads" with eighty pounds each on their shoulders. Even the Eskimo dog who could spring along from knoll to knoll with comparatively little risk, was not toting a fair share.

General dissatisfaction spread from these complaints. Gloom descended on the party. It was hot. Mosquitoes still pestered in the closeness of the forest on those lowlands. The packs, consisting largely of food, were naturally at their heaviest on the first day. The going proved vile.

The formation called "niggerheads" is peculiar to the Far North. During the hot, short summer of

perpetual sunshine the earth's surface expands and blossoms, but always frost lies in it. Anywhere from eighteen inches to five feet down is a hard foundation of solidly frozen ground. This frost belt forms a floor more impervious than rock, through which the thaw water and rain water cannot penetrate. As the spring moisture cannot seep downward, it collects under the surface and in time forms little rivers running in every direction, seeking outlets. These subterranean streams eat into the soil, wash it away, and undermine the sod above, so that the whole ground becomes a field of toadstools with grassy tops on slender earth stems, standing in a sea of mud, the mire halfway up their stalks.

A traveler, panting under his eighty-pound pack, must step from the center of one of these toadstool tops to the center of the next. If he does not hit off the distance quite right, and these knubs are of all shapes and sizes, he runs a very good chance of having the edge break or give, the stalk bending, so that he slithers knee deep into the mud between.

It was a weary, disgruntled party of five that pitched tents that night. Gerry was furious with the porters because all day long the party had been passing excellent camping sites and he realized last night's tales had been merely an excuse. He decided it was better not to bring the matter up, but this proved a mistake, for it allowed the Indians to make their grievance known first.

Right after supper Scotty, as spokesman for the rest, began to complain about the unfairness of Kak carrying so little. He did not get far with the

argument, for his cough was very bad and talking made it worse. The others now explained that their companion occasionally had hemorrhages and was expected to die of lung trouble.

"The factor warned you he was a sick man," they finished.

"But, good gracious, I didn't dream he was so sick. It is murder to let him work!" Gerry's feelings were divided between pity and indignation. His own back was aching. It had been all his short, unpracticed legs could do to scramble along with forty pounds. Here was a dilemma.

"Big, lazy, good-for-nothing Eskimo—him no work." Crow Tail was not to be diverted from his grievance or his enmity.

The white man looked at Kak questioningly.

"You made the arrangements," his partner remarked briefly and added, "Poor old Kanik had to carry all day on a lame back."

Evidently no concession was coming from that quarter. Gerry felt at his wits' end. He made a little speech to the Indians explaining that Kak was a full partner in the enterprise and must receive equal respect and consideration with himself. But the speech fell on deaf ears. Crow Tail merely grunted. The third porter sided with him, nodding his head vigorously. And Scotty broke into a spasm of coughing.

They separated to their tents glum and silent, and Kak accented his distrust by taking Kanik inside.

"We're in a dickens of a mess," Gerry said, pillowing his yellow head on his arms.

"If being boss means I can't punish, then being boss means I needn't slave," Kak answered stubbornly.

It brought forth a little groan from his white companion. The muscles of the aching limbs twitched painfully.

"I suppose that's right," Raikes said. "We can't back down from our stand as employers because they threaten us. We've got into this mess and we'll have to see it through. Of course I'm not exactly afraid of the Indians, even if they mutiny. They're three to two, but we're better stuff." Under his breath he added, "I wish to Heaven I'd taken McTaggart's advice."

The Eskimo did some thinking before he slept. That hint of the Indians' mutinying had not been wasted. But he gave no sign of any change in purpose.

Next morning gloom and hatred pervaded the camp until all were ready to shoulder their packs. Then Kak stepped up to Scotty and said:

"You're too sick to carry such a load. I'll change with you."

It was generously and diplomatically done. The youth had met Crow Tail's demands without budging an inch from his dignity. Scotty's dumb show of thanks was eloquent. It obviously impressed the third porter. Any talk of mutiny would meet with little response.

Gerry muttered a "Bravo, kid!" as the caravan moved off.

## CHAPTER XIII

### RAFTING IT ON THE BELL RIVER

THINGS went better the next two days. Crossing the mountains, they were above the tree line. That meant firmer ground, and fewer mosquitoes because of the autumn weather. Moreover the spirits of the whole party were pepped up by cool mornings with hoarfrost on the grass.

It had been agreed that Scotty's forty-pound load should be formed of the heavier foods such as the canned corned beef. As five men and a dog were eating into this regularly several times a day, it grew rapidly lighter, so that in the end he carried little more than his own bedding and camp kit, while Kak and the others toiled along with heavy packs.

The fifth day from Macpherson, hardship and annoyance cropped up again. They had been climbing in and out of river valleys for many hours, and continually crossing streams.

"How long before we reach the Bell?" Gerry asked, in perfect good faith.

The Indians exchanged looks.

"We'll no be seeing the Bell River this day," Scotty answered uneasily.

The young employer's habitually merry blue eyes now flashed to anger. "Is this another trick?" He turned indignantly on Crow Tail.

"No trick. Everybody make same camp here—very soon now. To-morrow up early and away. Walk little bit finish to the river. Cut trees for raft. Plenty big work—to-morrow."

Gerry needed no further explanation. The first night's camping argument had sunk into his memory too deeply.

"So it's really *six* days!" he exclaimed in exasperation. "Do you hear that, Kak? They 'no count little bit time' to finish either. It's really a six-day trip across the mountains. That leaves us two days short on our schedule!"

Kak shrugged.

The camp dinner was far from cheerful, and the two or three hours' march next morning dragged heavily. All the porters looked sulky. Although they could not understand a word of Loucheux, the boys judged, from the rapidity and volume of Crow Tail's speech, that he was agitating another grievance. The Indians' wrath gathered to hang like a cloud over the concluding portion of the march.

They reached the Bell River through a forest of tall spruce, which had been considerably thinned at the immediate banks by former raft builders. Gerry and Kak were eager to get to work at once, but the porters sat down with a gravity and finality that suggested they might never get up again. The three solemnly lighted their pipes and commenced

jabbering more incomprehensible talk. When asked by Gerry what was wrong they claimed their feelings had been hurt.

"We do same work as other porters. We want same pay as other porters," Crow Tail murmured in an aggrieved voice.

"Well, of all the ungrateful——" the white man began angrily.

"How much do the porters usually get?" Kak asked.

"Four dollars a day."

The murder was out. Both employers heard this price with amazed stares that Jim Joe took for a bad omen. He hurried on to explain at great length how ever since the Klondike gold rush there had been a standard payment for this kind of work. He and his companions were feeling injured, he said, that after their hard and faithful service they were not to receive the same wages as the other porters.

"But, holy smoke, man! I promised you thirty-five dollars, and I intend to keep that promise and pay you thirty-five dollars, though I don't see that you hurried much. Four dollars a day for six days is only twenty-four dollars. I'm giving you each a handsome present of eleven dollars."

The Indians consulted in their own language, and then, shaking his head severely, Crow Tail resumed:

"We don't like to be paid just something for all the trip. We want pay for each day. Four dollars a day is right price. We want four dollars a day each."

"Give the poor idiots four dollars a day, and let it

go at that," Kak advised. "We ought to be cutting down trees."

The Eskimo spoke with immense superiority. He was not, however, anxious to go at the job alone. He had helped his father fell trees at Dease River and considered it a ticklish business.

Kak's solution sounded easy, but Gerry was averse to giving the Indians their way, because he had arranged with McTaggart to pay their wages in goods and he feared if they presented orders for only twenty-four dollars each, the factor might think he had broken his word and was trying to cheat the "poor redskins." So he undertook to reason out with them this matter of payment. What little chance of success he might have had was lost at the start by his making a joke of the matter. The Indians could not see anything funny in it. Suspicion was aroused at once. They did not understand the white man's talk of numerals. The labor party consulted together and decided to hold out for the regular price. Gerry, in the kindness of his heart and the honesty of his intention, and, toward the end, from sheer doggedness also, argued with them upward of an hour. At the end of that time they were still unconvinced that thirty-five was more than twenty-four. They sat stolidly smoking their pipes and replied:

"We want four dollars a day."

The sun was creeping toward the western reach of water. Kak pointed warning from its slanting rays.

"Oh, rattlesnakes!" the white man cried, dis-

gusted. "If I agree to pay you twenty-four dollars each will you get up and chop trees?"

"Yes, yes!" They chorused eagerly. "We want to chop trees. We are anxious to do all you command us. We want to please you. We want to work for you. We want four dollars a day."

"All right, you'll jolly well get four dollars a day!" yelled Gerry, and the beaming vanquishers fell to.

Now the silent valley resounded with soft thuds of metal sinking into green wood and the whir of chips flying from the notched trunks. Kak watched the Indians, wide-eyed. It was amazing how quickly they cut through a noble spruce. Gerry also swung an ax with a good show of success, but he preferred to follow up the choppers. So he and Kak pulled the trees down after their trunks had been almost severed.

Goliath fell crashing through the underbrush. They leaped upon him. The "vorpal blade went snicker-snack." They cut off his head, severed his limbs, and rolled him to the river brink. First several of the stouter, shorter logs were chosen to form crossbeams, the lighter ones being lashed on these, side by side and close together, making a platform with an uneven surface like a section of corduroy road.

Constructing their floating home took less time than the boys had calculated, for they found a number of old logs lying on the beach and pressed these into service. When finished, the raft was about twenty feet long by seventeen feet wide. Stones

had been brought and a fireplace built in the middle of it, so that the passengers could take advantage of McTaggart's advice and travel day and night without even stopping to eat.

Everything ran smoothly now, and excitement mounted as the moment of departure neared. This they looked upon as the launching into the real adventure.

"By gosh, I feel like Noah going aboard the ark!" Gerry cried.

Spirits rose in leaps and bounds as they arranged their firearms, food, and bedding on the rough surface.

"The animals went in two by two,
The Eskimo dog and the kangaroo——

"Come on, Kanik."

Gerry seized his chum's pet by the harness and yanked him aboard. Kanik was all over the raft in a minute. From end to end of it. Up on the stores, over the fireplace—looking, smelling, wagging his tail, shaking his head as if to say, "Whatever kind of a contrivance is this, anyway?" Crow Tail flung a roll of bedding that narrowly escaped knocking the pup into the water. And Kak gave him another look. Then Gerry's voice sang out:

"Said the ant to the elephant,
Who are you pushing?"

The very blitheness of its sound forbade contention.

Shortly after that the boys were off, Gerry poling

into midstream, Kak, with one hand restraining Kanik from leaping ashore and with the other waving good-by.

"Don't forget to ask for your four dollars a day," he called at Crow Tail.

Gerry raised three cheers. The "savages" shouted guttural replies. The water channel widened between the Indians and the boys.

Down to the big river! Down to the big river! How romantic it sounded—and how dull it was!

The first evening Gerry and Kak could not make up their minds to go to bed. They sat hugging their knees before their firestones. Subtly the shadows lengthened. Excitement had them by the throat. They could hear their own hearts beating, feel their throbbing pulses—and that was all, as the sluggish current carried them slowly, mysteriously into the darkling bosom of the great unknown. On either side the river banks opened up like a pair of endless arms forever reaching out to drag them nearer. The sun had set colorlessly. The woods turned black. Lightning glimmered now and then over the tops of the hills. Stars shone wanly straight above, but the band of clouds on the horizon hid the moon. It was all inexpressibly lonely and remote.

Gerry studied the dark timber belt, straining his eyes. "Thought I saw a fire—low on the water's edge."

"There's nobody about these parts, surely." Kak's voice sounded uneasy.

"Suppose the woods were full of murdering Iro-

quois—bad fellows, out on the warpath, wearing their war paint and feathers—hanging around ready to pop out and scalp us—eh?"

"All Indians are bad." The Eskimo shivered.

"Oh, no, they're not, old scout. White boys' books are full of good Indians. I'll tell you a story——"

That was better. Kak didn't believe the story—all about the noble red man—but he liked listening to it a lot more than being frightened into conniption fits by pictures of enemies and blood feuds. Moreover the story eventually lulled him to sleep.

Down to the big river! How slow, how very slow it was. In all their planning of this great adventure the boys had forgotten about monotony.

The first day seemed dull, but the succeeding days and nights were worse. They took turns steering. They took turns cooking. They taught Kanik tricks. They kept watch for the smoke of native camp fires and grew quite heated in argument over false alarms that turned out to be only tricks of distance and of light.

"There she's rising. See?" Kak pointed due west.

"Naw!" derision in a single syllable.

" 'Tis so! This side of the tall pine."

"Naw! Go along. I can't see anything."

"Then you're blind."

"I am not!"

"You are, too." Finality. Native obstinacy.

"Since when was I blind? Who saw the whale spout?" Outrage.

"You can't shoot good."

That hit home. Gerry fell silent, and the Eskimo, considerate of other people's feelings like all his race, hastened to make amends:

"Maybe you're right, though. I don't see any smoke myself now."

Gerry went swimming one day, "to push the raft," as he humorously put it. He made a great to-do splashing about, and nearly frightened Kak out of his wits. Swimming is a strange art to the Eskimos. To fall into deep water means certain death unless assistance is at hand. To plunge into deep water for pleasure is beyond their understanding. The native felt sure that such foolhardiness would bring catastrophe. And Kanik also worked himself into a great state of alarm, running around the raft, barking and yapping.

"Come on in, old man. Come on in, boy," the swimmer coaxed between chattering teeth.

"He's got too much sense," Kak answered.

Certainly this sporting event broke the long tedium of doing nothing. But the water was so cold Gerry never tried it again. From experiment he dropped to abuse.

"The rotten stream is half frozen itself! It's the slowest river this side of kingdom come!" he would say and spit disdainfully into the Bell.

By and by the friends exhausted conversation. They talked less and less and when they did speak it was to argue. Gerry improvised songs to cheer himself up:

"Tommy ate a green banana
In the harbor of Havana,
Where the crocodiles come sunning on the sand.
And the mermaids sit on rocks,
Combing out their shining locks,
And harken to the 'barkin' of the band.

("That's your cue, Kanik.)

"Soon he felt a heavy crummie
In his solemn little tummie,
And lay down beneath a most poetic pine.
And the mermaids came and slapped him,
With their cooling tails flip-flapped him
Till he chortled: 'This is sim-pel-ly sublime!'"

These verses struck Kak all wrong. Unless he could understand every word he resented them—a new and strange symptom for him! "What's a banana?" he would ask morosely. "And what's a crocodile? What's a band—what's a mermaid?"

"Oh, let up!" Gerry cried at last. "Can't a fellow sing a bit to amuse himself without turning into a book of knowledge?"

"What's a book-of-knowledge?" Kak asked.

Between songs and arguments Gerry spent his time worrying. The slowness of the current and the two days dropped from their schedule in crossing the portage chafed his nerves like a hair shirt.

"We'll never get there, I tell you. Fifteen days of this—Jerusalem crickets! I'm fed up with three!"

"Maybe it won't be more than a week, if we have the luck to meet Indians lower down and get a lift

in a canoe." Kak's words were more cheerful than his tone.

It had started to rain the morning before and the voyageurs put in a miserable day under a steady drip, drip. For a while they had crouched beneath the small tarpaulin used to cover the food, with heads drawn in like sulky turtles and arms extended holding up the roof. It is against human endurance, however, to sit for long huddled in such a position on a corrugated floor. After a while the boys abandoned their shelter, preferring to take a soaking.

All night the rain continued. It spoiled their sleep. It damped their fire. And though it stopped at dawn, the morning broke gray and cold. Wet shirts and empty stomachs are poor shipmates. Hope lay in the doldrums and tempers wore raw.

They were passing along a shallow reach, and Kak, leaning over the edge of the raft, gazing down through the clear water, marked their progress by the river bottom. "Look at that stone there, will you! Look at that bunch of sticks! We're scarcely moving."

"Mud turtles have it on us. We can't be making half a mile an hour!"

"And you know what that means—McTaggart said: 'Low water and dangerous rapids.' "

There was a moment's silence. All at once the Eskimo broke out with: "I don't see why we ever came this long, roundabout river trip, when we could have walked across the mountains easy—just as that whaler fellow said!"

"Like ducks, we could!"

"Like deer, you mean."

"I do not. Walk across—huh!"

"If you'd had a decent pair of legs on you we could have footed it to Rampart House, easy. I could walk it any old time."

"Why didn't you say so, then?"

For an instant Kak was floored by that. "Ah, what's the use!" he answered impatiently. "You like boats. White men always want to go in boats and sleighs."

"Sour grapes!" laughed Gerry. "You were keen enough on the boat yourself. If you thought it was better to walk out, why didn't you speak up?"

He raised his voice, insisting on his point like a querulous old man, for discomfort and idleness can work the mischief with even the sweetest disposition.

The same combination of circumstances had left Kak in no mood to be bullied. "Well, I say so now," he replied angrily. "If you ever want to get anywhere you'll have to quit sitting on these silly logs like a brooding goose, and walk down river."

"We wouldn't gain any time that way?" A doubtful note in the white man's voice invited contradiction.

"Bet your life we would—I would! Do you think I can't walk more'n half a mile an hour? Sakes alive! Here we run the risk of being drowned, too, in a rapid, or losing all our food. Walking would be fun. We could carry light packs and shoot something when we ran short." The speaker's eyes kindled. The prospect of continuous action and the interest

of having to hunt to eat swept him to enthusiasm. He jumped up and seized a pole.

"What are you after?" asked Gerry.

"Poling to shore."

Raikes was silent till the raft swung clear of the sluggish current, then he began reasoning: "Say, take it easy. Let's talk about this. I don't believe we can do it. Nobody else ever did it. There must be a hitch somewheres. We'd better stick to our first idea. Little good ever comes of chopping and changing halfway through things. Suppose the walking's too rough. Suppose you don't see anything to shoot—what'll you do then?"

"Walk ahead until I do find something." The Eskimo laughed happily.

"Take a reef in your stomach—eh? That business ain't much good to walk on. I guess we'd better stay aboard."

"Lazybones! You'd rather sit than walk," Kak jeered. "I tell you I'm going to leg it to Rampart House. I'll beat you all hollow, too. Why, after the first day you won't be able to see my camp smoke."

The last shot roused Gerry's sporting blood. He snatched up the gauntlet like his father's son. "All right, you walk and I'll ride," the boy answered cheerfully. "Make it a race. Here, let me pole her in to shore while you get your pack ready."

Kak smiled and fell to on the stores. Instead of an ill-natured quarrel the argument had suddenly become a contest. Both felt relieved. By the time the raft grounded on a stretch of mud Kak's sup-

plies were packed. The comrades shook hands solemnly.

"Don't worry, Raikes, no matter how slow she gets—even if she goes backward. I'll send your news out from Eagle as soon as I arrive."

The Eskimo volunteered his service, showing all his teeth in a broad grin.

Kak strode off at a good rate, and Gerry poled furiously into midriver. The current seemed to have quickened. The raft slid along less slowly when tested by the river bottom, but compared to the human figure tramping away down the shore, it was hardly moving at all. Very soon Kak reached a bend. He stopped to thumb his nose before rounding the corner and a moment later vanished from sight. Kanik had already disappeared. Gerry found himself quite alone in that vast, unbroken wilderness, with a wide smile on his features and a lump in his throat.

One moment his friend was there, and the river flowed between, bridged by the cheerfulness of human rivalry. The next both man and dog were gone. The emptiness of the whole valley—earth and sky—smote the stranger like a blow in the face. His lonely situation, his helplessness, shrieked at him out of the silence. To be stuck on that cumbersome raft with low water—low water and the dangerous rapids ahead! The full horror of the trek, as it had first appeared to him before Kak volunteered to go along, rushed back a hundredfold, magnified by knowledge of hardships, and the actual setting of dark stream and darker forest.

What a fool he had been to let Kak go—to let him go alone, that is. Naturally Kak, the native, would know best about how to make his way through unbroken country. Gerry was half minded to pole ashore and follow his friend pell-mell. But pride kept him from giving way to the impulse.

After the first spasm of crazy fear, he began to see their race in a new light. It was an excellent provision for safe delivery of his news. Kak would send word to England as soon as he arrived—supposing anything happened to the raft and its cargo. "But what good would it do you then to have sent the news out?" asked common sense. It was a depressing thought. The sailor made a strenuous effort to keep his mind off disaster, yet underneath a current of foreboding flowed as steady and dull as the Bell River.

"If the raft is busted in the rapids I should worry about news," he muttered with grim determination. "Still, it might just as well be one drowned as two. I wish I'd made a will and left Kak something—he's a good scout."

Except for the interval when getting dinner, Gerry sat hour after hour with his feet drawn up, his arms nursing his knees, and his chin resting on them. The sun came out hot and welcome. The awkward craft swung in the current, half around and back again, but the sailor, in a brown study, never took his eyes from the stream.

Suddenly something rustled in the woods. A decided movement—moose or caribou. The boy's muscles tightened. Attention leaped. A second

sound, a scuttling noise, and the animal burst into view—Kanik!

Gerry's glance traveled ahead to another bend where a small sand spit projected from the shore. On the very tip was a man's figure hallooing and waving its arms, doing its utmost to attract notice —Kak! His chum could scarcely signal him for laughing.

With both hands cupped at his mouth Raikes bellowed, unnecessarily loud, "Ahoy! What do you want there?"

"Come in and pick us up."

"Nothing doing! You've got to walk out."

"Help!"

"Do I win?"

"You win—sure thing."

Without more words Gerry took the pole and began manipulating the bulky raft to shore. But he made a great business of it. He pushed with exaggerated motions, and almost let the heavy craft slip by the point. It did round the corner in quite a rush of current, and he had to hold hard on the pole while Kak and Kanik waded out.

"My, Kak, that was a near thing," the white man remarked gravely. "It would have been terrible if I'd missed the landing and the poor little dog had been obliged to walk to Rampart House."

"Quit your kidding," answered Kak good-naturedly. "We outwalked your speed, anyway. We've been downstream a mile or more beyond this and come back again. You win because my boots were so rotten from being wet that they're no use

on the rocks. Look at that!" He showed one Eskimo skin boot torn from ankle to toe.

Native boots have tops made of caribou hide soft as kid, and lowers of strong sealskin. They are excellent footgear and will wear as much as six months if taken care of. But Kak's had got wet constantly from the mud between "niggerheads" and in several showers, and had not been properly dried, so that they were badly mildewed and in no shape to stand steady travel over rocks.

"It wasn't the boots alone turned me back, though," the explorer continued. "A mile below here there's a big stream flowing into the Bell. It's too wide to cross on a log and too deep to ford——"

"And you can't swim!" Gerry's eyes danced.

"How would I get my clothes across if I could swim?" Kak asked.

The white man laughed and slapped his chum on the shoulder. "I'm glad to have you back, old boy. I missed you terribly. Let's have a good feed to celebrate. I didn't half enjoy my dinner all alone."

"Neither did I. Nasty, dry stuff I bolted down! I say, when we get below the stream let's go ashore and kill a beastie. I've got to have some fresh meat. That's what's wrong with me. I'm gloomy. I need red meat."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MYSTERIOUS CABIN

KAK halted. "Look here!" He pointed to the soft river-edge mud at his feet.

Gerry, hurrying to him, saw the tracks of a caribou leading away from the stream. All around them, except in the exact prints of the cloven hoofs, the earth was as wet as if a recent shower had fallen.

"Water still fresh," the Eskimo continued. "That fellow can't have left long ago."

"How you notice everything," said Gerry, regarding the telltale sign with interest.

Kak laughed, carefully modulating his mirth to harmony with the cryptic woods. "Drips always make puddles. The animals frequently stand still for a while before starting off—listening for danger, I suppose. This chap probably swam across stream. Do you think a caribou comes out of the river any dryer than a dog?"

"I don't think," said the white man in a disgusted tone. "Guess that's what makes me such a washout as a hunter! Well, if he's around, and we have a chance to bag him, let's go. We mustn't waste too much time."

"A good dinner of fresh meat won't be wasting

time. It will put heart into us." Kak turned in the general direction of the caribou tracks and led the way into the forest among the close-set trees.

High up a light wind stirred the spruce tops, but nothing moved beneath them. Underbrush was sparse, and the ground, covered with moss and grass, offered easy and silent advance. They proceeded north of west, over the rise of land, heading a little downstream, for they knew the boiling tributary that had proved Kak's Waterloo lay to their right and would turn the quarry back from that direction.

In this as in all other hunting exploits Kak took the lead, though penetrating the forest was a rarer experience for him than for Raikes. He felt as thrilled as American boys would feel if they found themselves walking through the Catacombs or in some complicated chain of subterranean caves.

As they progressed, the endless succession of trees grouped and regrouped before them like a regiment on parade, its men stepping out of the ranks, falling back, or closing up, to form new figures and military exercises. Kak's glance, trained to search long, open distances for game, was confused by the ceaseless stream of tree trunks crowding him on either hand. He carefully watched the slanting shadows to mark direction, for here was no chance to guide himself by one distant mountain's relation to another.

Kanik was nosing at his master's heels and Gerry was following close.

"For the love of Heaven, don't let's lose each

other," he said. "This is one of the thickest woods I've ever been in."

The white man's voice was hushed by the breathless magic of the chase.

At first the boys had talked, but as they struck deeper into the forest its mystery pressed upon them, and only a brief remark, now and then, in a whisper, broke the surrounding quiet.

Suddenly Kak stopped, frozen in his tracks.

"See anything?" Gerry breathed over his shoulder.

The native made a hasty sign for silence.

"Something moving—beyond—there."

He jerked his head to one side, and Gerry froze also, listening. He could sense rather than hear some movement on the moss. Kanik was wagging his tail, sniffing, gazing into his master's face with eager eyes asking permission. A word to hold the dog, a rifle hammer cocked, and, soundless as a shadow in his soft skin boots, the Eskimo began to creep toward the game. Gerry, unable to move so swiftly without noise, contented himself by keeping his friend in sight.

They had gone maybe twenty yards, with that peculiar sense of a living thing beyond them, when Kak dodged all at once behind a tree and raised a warning hand. Gerry caught Kanik's harness and slid into the shelter of another spruce. He peered between the branches for a glimpse of caribou and subconsciously tightened his nerves against the rifle shot—but no report came.

Raikes looked again at his native companion and found to his amazement that Kak was not even

attempting to aim his gun. Instead he made a motion for Gerry to come to him.

Walking on the toes of his clumsy seaman's boots, with shoulders hunched in a strained effort to keep his weight from crushing lichens, the white boy stole out of his own shelter and crossed to his chum's side. Kak put his lips to Gerry's ear and scarcely breathed the word:

"Man."

It was so unexpected, so freighted with meaning in that hidden place, that the hearer started. He felt trickles of fear creeping down his flesh like drops of water down a windowpane. When he made a peephole in the spruce boughs, and his eyes found the man, these tiny separate emotions joined and ran together. Apprehension streamed over him.

One-Eyed Nick was not a reassuring person to meet in a deserted road, say, on a dark night—nor in the heart of a deserted forest. When the boys came on him he was sitting on the end of a fallen tree. His gigantic back was curved forward, his knees were crossed, one wrist supported the other elbow, while his second hand clutched the stem of a short, black pipe held between his teeth. Long poles of shadow falling athwart the stranger gave him the sinister appearance of a prisoner behind bars. His single eye glared right at the hunters apparently, though its glance was not concentrated. The scarred side of his face suggested a malignancy that, coupled with his strength and bulk, must have intimidated the most courageous.

"A giant!" Gerry thought he spoke, but the words died in his throat.

"Bad one," Kak whispered.

The boys stood a long time watching while One-Eye smoked and ruminated.

The trapper had easily made good his intention of walking over the hills, striking due south from the cache he had built of the camp goods deserted by Alunak. Had he seen the two youths he would have been nearly as surprised as they were at seeing him, for he imagined himself to have several days' start of them. He had not calculated on their making such a quick trip from Herschel to Macpherson in the police boat, nor on their floating continuously on the raft, day and night.

He intended taking a look first at the scene of his crime to be sure that no telltale clews were left. And for that purpose he had set out at dawn from his temporary camp. Later he planned to move upstream, meet the boys perhaps five miles above the house, and conduct them to it by the long way round. He was intent on playing up to his own part as the generous and devoted friend. He wanted to make everything as difficult and complicated as possible. The farther he had to conduct the heir, the longer he would have to tell his story and work upon the boy's feelings.

Finding a certain small spot in a dense forest promised to be a tiresome, long job. Nick had begun by blazing his trail, changing the form of marking several times, so that if he chanced to recross it he would have some notion of his where-

abouts. Luck had favored him. The first day of his search he had stumbled on this remembered scene—the large tree fallen across the flat moss-covered rock. He had sat on the end of that log before and he knew it lay near his objective. The trapper felt certain that when he had finished his pipe he could walk almost straight ahead to the nearly completed cabin once occupied by himself and Cuthbert Raikes.

Had the stranger been any ordinary-looking white man the young hunters would have hailed him at once. But his evil face and his amazing size warned them off. They were afraid to step forward, not indeed minded to move in any direction lest they attract attention. All thought of the caribou dropped out of mind. This person in the forest represented mystery.

"Let's wait and see which way he goes?" Gerry whispered.

Kak nodded, laying a finger on his lips.

So it came about that Nick, the shrewd, instead of watching on the river bank to waylay his old chum's son and take him to the clearing in the woods, was watched, and did, unwittingly, conduct the boy—or at least guide him—to his father's house.

By and by the big man knocked the dottle out of his pipe and rose to go. The hunters held their breath. Not only did Nick stand six feet three, but his short neck and high shoulders enforced his bulk. Kak and Gerry instinctively clutched each other's hands as the giant moved away.

Nick walked slowly. He stopped here and there and cut a branch nearly through so that it hung down, marking the path in a manner likely to be overlooked by casual observers. The boys noted this silently. They read into the action more meaning than it held and exchanged looks.

Whatever the stranger was about it obviously had nothing to do with hunting. He moved boldly forward, careless of noise, and the soft thud of his little hatchet hacking the trees would have been enough to scare away any game within hearing.

"No wonder we failed to find our caribou," thought Kak.

Gerry's mind was entirely preoccupied with curiosity as to the man's object. "Could it be the mountain of jade?" he asked himself. He plucked his comrade's sleeve, and pointed ahead, whispering, "Jade?"

Kak stood still. All his being seemed gently to relax. He waited a few minutes, silent, caressing Kanik's ears, until the giant had moved away and then spoke:

"Let his Nibs get ahead. We can follow these tree marks as well as following him and with a lot more comfort, not to speak of safety. I don't suppose the big chap would be any too good medicine for us if he saw us. Men that work alone are generally bent on secret business. This might be jade —but if it is jade near here it's no mountain—a small hill maybe."

"We'd have to draw in our horns about that fortune."

Kak looked at Gerry sharply. "We're taking a lot of time over this. How about it?"

Raikes smiled. "We'll make up the time if we have to carry that old raft down river! Say, kid, what do you think I am? Do you imagine I'm going to leave this game unfinished—without seeing what he has in his cache? Why, it might be gold! We're not a million miles from the Klondike. What one strikes another may strike. Gold!"

The white man rolled the magic syllable on his tongue, but it struck no answering spark in his Eskimo companion's eyes. Kak had not been brought up in the land where they worship gold.

Following those scarred boughs proved more difficult than the boys had imagined. Still they persisted and were rewarded at last by seeing the edge of the forest trees stand out black against the sunglow like a row of sentinels.

"Clearing," muttered Kak, breathless with suspense.

They approached cautiously, flitting from cover to cover, and presently got a fair view of an amazing thing. An open pocket filled with golden light lay in the heart of the forest like an amber ornament decking a green velvet gown. The clearing was centered by a cabin built of logs. It was large for such a house in such a place and had evidently never been finished. No windows had been cut in it, but a doorway without trim or door was on the side toward them. The house looked old. The stumps left from its building were bleached gray on top and were surrounded by bunches of thriving

shoots. Many of them had grown up again into respectable young trees. No path led to or from the place, though bent saplings showed where the stranger had recently broken his way through. He was standing now, a huge hand on either side of the rough doorway, peering within. He remained quite motionless, except for turning his head from side to side. He seemed to be making his eyes do duty for both hands and feet.

"Wonder why he doesn't go inside?"

"Nothing there, likely."

"Well, we'd better hop around to the back," Gerry said. "When our little playmate has had enough of looking he will naturally return to his trail—and we're camped right on it."

Kak nodded.

Silently, with a controlling hand on the dog's harness, the boys skirted around to the opposite side of the building, keeping the clearing on their left. They had to make a detour, going outside the screen of brush behind the house, for fear of betraying their presence by a crackling noise if they tried to push through. It surprised them greatly to find sunshine falling on their right also.

"A settlement?" the white man queried.

"It's the river," Kak answered. "I thought we were far inland, and we're not more than a short walk from the water's edge. I'll bet if it were running swiftly we could hear it."

"Then that settles the jade idea! He's probably just rafting downstream like us. Wonder if there's anybody with him? Believe I'll take a peek."

"Wait," cautioned Kak. "I don't think he came by the water. If he had been exploring and this was his return journey he would not have marked the trees. He's got a camp somewhere and wants to get back to it. Let's lie near the house and watch. When he leaves we can take a look around."

They walked to the end of the brush patch, rounded it and lapped back to the clearing, stealing on silently as a couple of bandits bent on dirty work. Both were enjoying themselves to the full. They were immensely thrilled by the mystery they had built around the stranger and by the sense of their own stealth.

From their new vantage point they could see that the cabin had been about half roofed with slender trees cut into poles. Mystery oozed from its blank walls. Mystery radiated from the pale sunshine slanting through the open roof. It whispered in the tapering tops of the trees swayed by the light wind. It stalked all around in the shadows of the embracing forest, like a wolf circling its prey. Mystery sank into the watchers' souls. It held them tongue-tied.

For what seemed hours and was probably ten minutes, the boys crouched in the edge of the brush, waiting—waiting. A rabbit darting suddenly across the open space nearly made them die of heart failure. Kak's arm was around Kanik's neck. The dog quivered in every muscle and gave one small, whispered growl. His master cajoled him into quietness.

There was a sound of footsteps, snapping twigs,

whicking saplings—the stranger coming toward them. Gerry drew and cocked his revolver. They waited. Silence, silence—suspense and silence—almost unbearable. Then sounds of movement in the underbrush very close. The sounds ceased—footfalls retreated. The man had given up whatever he was searching for, and had passed on to the river. They breathed more easily. Silence—a long, long silence.

"I guess he's gone," said Kak and took his arm from Kanik's shoulders.

## CHAPTER XV

### "FINDERS KEEPERS"

THE boys looked into each other's eyes, asking, "What next?"

"I'm for inside the house," Gerry said in answer to that silent question.

"Bet you the place is empty. If there had been anything to see, he would have gone in and looked at it."

That sounded logical, but Gerry was obstinate. "Well, I intend to make sure. We've been acting foolishly. I don't believe there is a thing to be afraid of. The man went down to the river. He's a rafter, just as I told you, and probably quite harmless. Having only one eye would make any fellow look rummy. I'm kind of sorry we didn't hail him. We might have joined up for company." The speaker glanced irresolutely in the direction of the Bell. " 'Fraid he'll be away by now."

Kak's native instinct warned him that the strange is hostile. He answered abruptly: "Let sleeping dogs sleep."

"Shucks! I'm properly ashamed of myself being so scared of a white man. Come on and explore the cabin."

"Four unfinished walls don't need much explor-

ing. But go ahead, you—make it snappy. Kanik and I will stay here and watch for another rabbit."

Gerry regained some of his wounded manhood by boldly stepping out of the brush and stalking across the clearing. He did not pause with hands leaning on the outer wall as the stranger had done, but marched right into the house—into a scene calculated to stir the very depths of his romantic imagination.

The house as well as being large was built on a luxurious scale. All the logs had been squared and neatly fitted together so that the interior walls were nearly smooth. The sods, originally turned to form a mud floor, had sprouted into mangy grass growing between various objects that seemed to have been dumped down with scant ceremony. There was a stove of sorts, an empty dunnage bag under some bedding, and a full rucksack. A saucer which had been used as a grease cup and other odds and ends were strewn about. Homely little things, covered with the clean dust of years accumulated under a clean sky and serving to accentuate the deserted aspect of the place. After the crisp, autumn air and autumn-scented woods, the room smelt heavily of mold, age, and decay. The windowless walls lent it an unfriendly jaillike appearance, though it was flooded with light from the partly open roof.

Such a find was too thrilling to be borne alone. Gerry dodged back through the doorway and with quick, circular motions of his arm signaled Kak forward. His impressionable nature plunged deeper into mystery forbade him to cry aloud.

The Eskimo came at a run. Gerry's face told him louder than words that he was missing something. He stood amazed in the middle of the floor and gazed about. Less familiar with the earmarks of civilization, it took him longer to note and realize the fine points of the display. Gerry helped:

"This is no miner's shack, kid. Somebody who cared for comfort was preparing to live here."

"You're right. It's pretty darned fine for a wooden house. I wonder what made the owner leave?"

"I wonder what made him come! Why should anybody build a permanent dwelling in the middle of a forest, halfway to nowhere?"

The question fell on deaf ears, for Kak's mind was entirely filled by the evidence of carelessness about him.

"Seems as if they vamoosed. Why, they even left their stove!" The native could scarcely believe that pioneers in any wild stretch of country would be foolhardy enough to leave behind their traveling stove. "And look here!" He attempted to lift a fur robe lying by the dunnage bag, but the skin tore away in his hand. The rotten thing fell to pieces from its own weight as soon as it was touched.

"That must have been a beauty in its day!"

"Cats' whiskers, this place is old!" Gerry contemplated the ruin. He lifted the torn fragments. "See—the pelt has been lined. It was no local kill but a real fur robe bought in some city."

The white man leaned against the wall and mar-

veled aloud, "It beats me how any fellow could look in at all this, the way we saw him doing, and not come in and examine the stuff down to the last inch."

Kak grunted. He was busily intent on that very course, beginning with the stove. This he found in worse condition than the robe, if such a thing were possible. The metal was eaten through with rust and dropped when he touched it. Behind in the corner stood a rifle. He fell on this prize instantly—brought it out, hefted it, tried it at his shoulder, attempted to pull the rusty trigger. Though it would not go off, it was a perfectly good gun. Noting that the metal had the same heavy, opaque look of the mounting on the old revolver in Alunak's tool bag, he gave it a strong, hard rub. It gleamed.

"A silver-mounted Winchester!" exclaimed Gerry, who had been watching with interest. "You've got something there. And it's 'finders keepers' from the look of this place."

"Let's see if there is any writing on it like on yours."

The boys looked closely over the old weapon for an engraved plate or coat of arms, but the only identification it bore was the maker's name. Kak felt secretly delighted. He might have had to give the treasure up could they have found a mark. Now it became his. He had always been a trifle envious of Gerry's magnificent revolver. This rifle being so much larger seemed to make its owner even more important. He sat down on the ground

cross-legged and began to polish the metal with scraps torn from the old fur rug.

All idea of hunting fresh meat, all realization of wasting time, had completely passed from the boys' minds. While Kak gloated over the material value of his find, Gerry was poking about, seeking clews to help him reconstruct the drama of this obvious desertion. Had some woodsman, settling here, gone out on the river and been drowned? Had he gone into the forest after game and been lost—or maybe killed by a bear? In the latter case he would have had his firearms along. Raikes tried and rejected one romance after another. He was subconsciously aware of the portentous. Something had happened here—something monstrous, vital, far-reaching. He made his imagination fallow for the tragedy. His soul was obsessed by anxious wonder. Inevitably Gerry must have been drawn to a man who had lived so richly in the wilds. His nature responded to a temperament expressed in smooth walls, heavy robes, silver mountings, and the dignity of space and elbowroom.

"Poor chap," he thought. "So well started in whatever he was at."

Curiosity and sympathy craved further knowledge of the builder. He wandered about the room, handling useless articles—a mildewed box of matches, a pipe, some ends of decayed rope, a hatchet. He rummaged through the rucksack which had been set on a slab of wood and in moving it uncovered a smallish, thick book lying outside the sack. Emotion rushed over him. How much a

book might tell! He stared. The volume was bound with the soft leather and dog ears of a Bible. His hand reached for it eagerly. Years of lying in one place had molded the leather to the wood. The book resisted. Gerry gave a little tug, and the top cover and flyleaf came away in his hand.

"Oh, hang!"

He was about to toss the useless leather aside, but a twinge of the reverence he had been taught at home restrained him. He laid the cover carefully on the ground, face down. The blank flyleaf attached to the end paper fluttered and settled into place, and a casual glance revealed on its yellow surface, written finely in pale ink, his father's name, with a date that must have gone back to Cuthbert's school days.

At first Gerry felt no surprise. It seemed as if he had expected this—just this or something very similar—to happen, ever since he had started out on his search. Some power greater than his own volition had led him to his father's house.

The boy stood still, his eyes riveted on the page and his whole soul flowing out responsive to his surroundings. The mystery was magically cleared away. He could read the signs about him plain as print. Who but Cuthbert Raikes would have bothered to build himself such a place in the woods—a temporary camp probably? Knowing his father's moods Gerry could add that now. The gold seeker had made a stop for some reason. He had changed his mind and moved on. These luxurious things—well, it had not been convenient to transport them

farther—and that was that. He looked at the cheap traveling stove which had represented value to Kak, the Eskimo, and smiled ironically. He glanced at the robe, at the rifle. Plausibility stumbled over the latter. Yet the very extravagance of discarding such a thing was proof of his father's touch. Cuthbert Raikes—the magnificent, overequipped, overburdened with belongings—forced to abandon his valuables here in the woods. With what a gesture he would do it—and never again give them a thought. Gerry wondered if old Alunak had found the revolver in some other such deserted camp or had really obtained it from a white man on the "big river."

Affection surged suddenly over the youthful heart. He could not remember his father, but love had been stimulated all his life by endless wonderful stories of a great-hearted, open-handed hero. His glance wandered slowly, jealously around the walls that had actually sheltered his parent. Awe was dominant in his mood. Its penetrating personality made him want to hug facts to himself for a few moments, so he refrained from imparting the news to Kak. Wanting something flat to pry up the rest of the book, he asked for the loan of his friend's knife in a voice carefully charged with neutrality.

Blade in hand he returned to the corner and easily raised the book from its roots on the wood. Here was more witness of his father. Gerry moved in a sort of trance, stunned by coincidence. He could hardly believe what he saw. As a boy he had been told of that very Bible. His father read it

every morning. Many and many a time the religious streak in Cuthbert Raikes had been held up to his son as a worthy example.

Gerry stood with the book in his two hands like one paralyzed. Gradually he came back to normal mood. His pulses, stilled by the tremendous discovery, began to beat again. Body and brain functioned. He knew now that he was surprised—surprised and thrilled. His lessening emotion found itself on that common ground. He could anticipate how these facts were going to knock his companion, by and by, when he was ready to share the secret. He would not be ready until he had finished his private investigation. He shifted the book into one hand and with the other fitted the broken cover onto it. How rotten and crumbly it was all through! No wonder. The Bible had already been old when it was brought into the Arctic.

Thought swerved again to the fun of telling Kak. He glanced at the back of the Eskimo's head bent over the scouring. Kak was very intent on that rifle. Well—he should keep it. Gerry felt exalted by his own nobility as he made this mental decision.

He was holding the chunky book upright between his hands. In his preoccupation it slipped against its broken cover. His swift movement to save it from falling set the leaves fluttering. A separate piece of paper flew out and sailed down in graceful circles to his feet.

Gerry laid his treasure on the roll of bedding and stooped for that single page. His hand trembled. Perhaps this would be a letter from his father, writ-

ten against a chance of mailing. The paper was yellow and stained by mold. It rattled in his shaking fingers. No letter! The leaf was covered with drawing, not writing. His first disappointment quickened to interest as he saw that the pencil lines formed a map. A certain spot was marked by a black cross, and hastily scrawled below were the words: "Jade mountain lies north by east of here."

The realization of material wealth is very different in effect from the realization of sentiment. One reacts on the heart, the other on the brain. It took Gerry about three seconds to recognize what he held; the next his voice rang out in a wild whoop:

"Jade! Kak, Kak! I've found the jade! Our fortune is fixed. Here—here's a map, directions and everything—take us right to the place. Dash it, kid—you're a millionaire!"

Silence.

Gerry's eyes were still devouring the lines of the old drawing. For an instant he hardly missed the yell that should have responded to his noisy triumph. Then he glanced up. He saw Kak was looking fixedly at something, fascinated as a steer gazing at a fire. He followed the direction of the other's eyes, turned and looked, too.

Silence—dead, dread silence—filled the universe.

Both boys found themselves staring into the malign face of One-Eyed Nick, whose great bulk blocked the doorway.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A FIGHT WITH A GIANT

NO wonder the boys were stark from fear. If Nick had looked troublesome when sitting with features relaxed and mind at ease, his expression now seemed venomous. The bushy brows were drawn together, while the lips writhed apart in a conciliatory grin. The whole contradictory effect was heightened by a ruddy after-sunset glow falling through the open roof.

At his first glance he had guessed the visitors' identity. This curly-headed, blue-eyed Saxon, already standing on the spot to which the trapper planned conducting him, was Gerry Raikes. His swarthy second on the floor was Kak, the intrepid youth who stopped at nothing. The sheer bad luck of these two having found the cabin inadvertently kindled hot rage in their would-be mentor's soul, an emotion flaming to guilty hatred when he recollected that maybe their coming was not by chance. Perhaps they had encountered Alunak somewhere along the way—in which case they already knew him, Nick, for a murderer.

Resentment had surged thus through One-Eye as he stood undiscovered outside the doorway, watching Kak polishing the old rifle and Gerry

transfixed by the book. He realized at once how the first half of his elaborate plan had failed. Without the cream called mystery the dish of sentiment he had to offer would be no thicker than skimmed milk. Drink strong enough for calves. Yes—properly presented Gerry would lap it up—that is, if they had not met Alunak. But the Eskimo was a man in all practical matters. Kak would measure and weigh—ask questions, and as likely as not discount the replies.

"Still, it isn't his funeral," Nick thought.

Despite this serious setback the rest of his scheme —worming his way into Gerry's confidence—was worth a trial.

With difficulty One-Eye had controlled his anger to this milder, diplomatic mood. He was about to announce himself by a cheery greeting, when the white man unfolded the fallen paper, and that wild, triumphant cry of "Jade" startled the silence.

The effect on the eavesdropper can scarcely be described. All his long, weary existence passed in one flash before him. Eighteen years he had spent trying to garner the information on that faded sheet!

Nick knew that an Indian whom Cuthbert Raikes had saved from drowning in the Bell River had imparted to him the whereabouts of a fabulously valuable jade mountain situated away north in the Eskimo country. He did not know, however, that Raikes had jotted down the details nor that there was any documentary evidence existing. When he had killed his partner in a burst of jealous

rage, roused by the other's evident leadership and the superior respect paid to him by the rabble gathered to dog their course, he had realized too late that the secret of the location of the fortune died with the Englishman.

Blaming his luck rather than his vile temper, Nick had sworn to find the mountain for himself. A whole mountain, he reasoned, must be easy to discover, though all he had to go on were hints dropped in conversations, when Raikes had first imparted the news to him and suggested abandoning the rush for possible gold and striking out in an opposite direction toward this positive prize.

For eighteen years One-Eye had roamed the hills looking—looking—looking. Beset by heat and flies, in icy cold, through blinding snows, starvation periods, loneliness and discomfort, he had stuck to the quest, while all the time the secret lay snug between the leaves of the dead man's Bible. It might have been his at the start had he possessed the courage to search his victim's effects.

That, Nick had not dared. Stabbing a friend in the back is a low enough deed to shake any villain's nerve. After his bluff of smallpox had scared their followers off, the murderer had returned to dig a trench, dump the splendid body in, cover it, and pull the brush together over the spot. Then he had fled. Even to-day, after so long, he had shrunk from setting foot in the room—that room where his secret was still lying untouched and undiscovered.

Nick's very familiarity with the hiding place added to his disgust. Raikes' Bible! Who would

have thought of a secret lying there? The evidence of his partner's superior mentality made One-Eye choke, his wisdom in never mentioning the paper, his craft in keeping it thus—perfectly open, yet perfectly safe. For the last thing any of the pack of human jackals would have bothered to touch was that sacred book. All the accumulated impatience and disappointment that had made the trapper's latter years so bitter rose in him now. Flaming anger turned to cold rage—the sort of chill emotion leading to brutality rather than passionate knife thrusts.

Nick stepped through the door and drew himself up, towering above the lads confronting him.

"Give me that!" he commanded, holding out his hand.

"What for?" asked Gerry, meeting glower with glower. The boy's face was considerably whiter than the disputed page, but he managed to pronounce his words fairly steadily.

"Because I want it." Mutters of the suppressed storm came in that terse reply.

By way of answer young Raikes folded the map and buttoned it into the pocket of his blue flannel shirt.

Kak, who did not know the source of the paper and was on the outside of their argument, thought this the bravest, the most foolhardy thing he had ever seen any man do. It was exactly the gesture Raikes senior would have made and its coolness took Nick back.

"The paper's mine," he said lamely.

Gerry folded his arms over his chest sternly. "How, then, does it come to be in my father's book?"

Here was news for both the Eskimo and the trapper. His father's book! How did he know whose book it was? Kak glanced about helplessly and got to his feet. One-Eye, forgetful of the name in the Bible, jumped to the conclusion that they had met Alunak. His embarrassment passed. He glared. The lad had a look of Cuthbert about him. It was a nerve-wrecking thing to see him standing there on the very spot where his father had died. Nick wasn't accustomed to having nervous chills scampering up and down his spine. He disliked it exceedingly. The tension reacted against that self-control instilled by greed. A sudden wave of hatred of all humanity, a violence such as had swept him on to strike the aged shaman, overpowered him now. He leaped forward, arm upraised ready to strike. But his glance held no hypnotic mastery of the white man as it had held over the "savage." Gerry had fenced a little and read in his enemy's eye what to expect. He neatly dodged that descending blow and turned with squared fists.

The force of Nick's swing spending itself on empty air made him stagger forward. He regained his balance with a surprising wrench and turned for a fresh attack. The amazing size of the man enabled him to stand beyond reach and cuff his opponent with one hand while he held the other as guard over his body. Gerry wasn't taking any dog punishment, however. He danced to the right,

dodged to the left, twirling his fists around each other like a pugilist warming up, and exasperated his enemy beyond bearing. Missing a good right jab, the giant suddenly lost all discretion and hit out with his left. Instantly Gerry sprang in and began a rapid tattoo on the iron stomach. He grabbed the lean thighs and butted with his head.

Nick thrust his great thumbs under the boy's waistband, lifted him clear, and shook till he almost shook him out of his pants. Kak's hand had already gone to his belt and found his knife missing. He saw it was war to the death. The white boy's teeth were rattling and his head bobbing about like a rag doll. There was no time to lose. The enraged trapper would finish by dashing Gerry's brains out on the ground. Quick as lightning Kak grabbed the silver-mounted rifle, swung it up, and brought it crashing across those outstretched arms.

With a howl Nick dropped Gerry and turned on the Eskimo.

That howl was the first vocal sound raised in the fight. Kak answered it with a "Yai!" that should have made any civilized being's heart stop. He closed on Nick.

Kanik, who had been fooling about outside, watching for the rabbit, heard his master's cry, and dashed for the scene like a small whirlwind.

The native struck a new line of battle by winding his legs around the trapper's leg and pinioning one brawny arm before Nick could reach for his knife. Gerry recovered and got in a chin blow that tilted the giant's head backward and set him swaying,

then Kanik added his savagery to the savage scene.

It was no club contest according to Queensberry rules, there in the depths of the still forest, but a ferocious onslaught. All of it was ferocious—man, boys, dog all given over to fury, biting, scratching, stamping, struggling, pitting themselves against each other for life or death. The very silence was ferocious, broken only by the sound of battle—the scrape of seaman's boots, the panting of exhausted lungs, the heave and gasp as Nick threw off his adversaries—got rid of them one after another—kicked Kanik away—lifted Kak by his hair—shook himself free or nearly free, writhed loose at one place to be caught at another. The tensity within that four-walled ring embedded in the forest was ferocious. The absence of human speech, the red light streaming in, the smell of moldy canvas and mildewed fur trodden by the grind of skin-clad heels as the fight surged this way and that way—all ferocious!

Nick was like Gulliver bound by the Lilliputians—his adversaries proved too many for him. The boys wound themselves about his arms, hampered his movements, dragged him down at last, panting and spent. The instant his head touched the sod Kanik sank vicious teeth into his ear. There was a roar of pain. Gerry, astride the giant's chest, unbuckled a holster and covered him with Cuthbert Raikes' revolver. Kak went for his rifle, which was leaning against the outer wall beside the rifle their prisoner had discarded before entering. Assurance

of great personal strength may betray a strong man into such carelessness, and besides, Nick's first intention toward the boys had been pacific.

"Don't shoot," the sailor commanded. "Call off the pup. Now, keep him covered while I frisk him. Hands up! Get up, you madman!"

Nick's hands were already up. They remained so, one at his wounded ear, while Gerry took his knife.

When this was done the fair-skinned boy, his shirt hanging from him in rags, stepped back beside his partner. His face was very stern. All's square in a free fight and anything goes that just happens, but the rough-and-tumble being over he felt an uncanny sense of responsibility. He did not want to shoot the white man in cold blood. Yet, what else could they do? How could they rid themselves of his unwelcome presence? Gerry put off decision by parley. He had a very natural curiosity as to why Nick was there.

"You, stranger," he began manfully, "explain yourself, will you? What do you mean by intruding in this house? Who are you, anyway?"

Nick's mind was working rapidly. He had expected nothing better than a cold, short shrift. Now that he saw they shrank from killing him, his wits turned toward possession of the map and escape. Breaking away was clearly impossible. But Gerry seemed to be offering him pardon or at least reprieve, another diplomatic opportunity, in that masterful demand: "What are you doing in this house?" He leaped at the chance, replying in words calculated to arrest:

"I am the friend of the builder of this house."

"Did you know Cuthbert Raikes?"

Consummate villain that he was, Nick pretended to gulp at the name. He hastily turned away the good side of his face and brought his hand across as if wiping a tear.

"The best pardner any man ever had—God rest his soul."

"Why do you say that last? Is he—dead?"

"Dead these eighteen years. He died right here in this room, layin' on the old robe in the corner."

Nick glanced about to catch the local color for his tragedy. Noting how little of the fur remained after the way their savage feet had trod it under, he jerked his head again as if at some work of infamy and sighed. His voice had changed from gruff to wheedling. His crafty eye watched Gerry's face.

Raikes was struggling against his emotions—wanting to act like a young Solomon, wanting to cry. He felt the rock of his resentment melt and flux. His expression altered. The trapper had been waiting for some question that would lead to the introduction of his own heroic part. But, since this was not forthcoming, he galvanized attention with another startling sentence:

"Died of the smallpox, Cuthbert did, on his way down river to the Klondike."

There was a pause.

"What's smallpox?" Kak asked.

His chum, snatching a chance of delay by neutral talk, plunged into explanation: "It's an infectious

disease—very dangerous. A bad sort of measles, only much, much worse."

Eskimos thoroughly understand the terrors of measles, for that common sickness takes a heavy death toll in the Arctic. Kak was impressed.

Gerry's words gave Nick a new lead. "This is a dickens of a place to develop smallpox, and he had a dickens of a bad dose, too. I shouldn't be surprised if the germs was still in all his things."

The arch plotter wanted to scare the boys away from that Bible and the map, but Gerry only shrugged.

"Can't be any danger so long after. Don't germs die away from human beings?"

The trapper did not insist. His position made him anxious to please. His mind was more than half occupied with the treasure mountain. He eyed the tatters of the white boy's shirt, wondering what had become of the map. His glance wandered to the floor and was jerked back by Kak's voice asking:

"Was that why you didn't come inside, only looked in, when you stopped here first?"

"Was you about then?"

Nick glared at the speaker. A great uncertainty beset him. For the first time he felt rattled. It was impossible to guess how much these youngsters knew. He could do nothing. Kak's gun still covered him. Receiving no answer to his return question the giant continued in a whining tone, meant to be placating, and which, taken along with the matter of his speech, did affect Gerry.

"Infectious as the dickens, smallpox is. When

Raikes' state got known to the followers—low tykes that had attached themselves to him like foxes on a bear's trail—they lit out every one. Couldn't make tracks down river quick enough. Not a man jack of them would stay to help me nurse him. So I had to do what there was to do myself. I stayed to the end, and gave my pard a decent burial underground where the foxes wouldn't disturb him none."

"That was very noble of you."

Seeing the method worked, Nick let his tone sink to a sniffle. He plastered sentiment on thick, faking due modesty. "No, no! Not that—not a bit of it. A tribute to a good pard, nothing else! I've always been a good pardner and I've always had good pardners. Alunak was a good——" Suddenly he broke off. He cast a searching glance at the face opposite. But Gerry, wide-eyed with excitement, seemed to have noticed nothing. Nick hurried on, "Doing it proper helped me, too. I couldn't have rested right in my bed nights with the thought of his bones being spilled about by wild——"

"Don't!"

A single word, peremptory, hoarse, indicated that the boy's impressionable soul could stand no more. One-Eye struggled not to let elation mark his gravity.

"Sit down," Gerry continued. When they were seated on the floor, he appealed to Kak:

"This man was my father's friend. You have heard what he said. Our introduction seems to have been a huge mistake. We must talk a lot. I want to learn many things. Turn around, lad, and put up your rifle. Come and join us."

## CHAPTER XVII

### ALUNAK'S REVENGE

KAK grunted and sat down, but he kept his gun trained on the outsider. His quick ear had detected the one Eskimo word in Nick's talk—Alunak. Instantly suspicion had jumped to the idea that Nick was the white man of the big river—the white man from whom Alunak had got the revolver. He sensed something strange—something about the connection. The giant had evidently known they were there—had come south deliberately to meet them, yet he did not say so. Had he wanted his gun back or had he wanted the map? And if he wanted the map enough to fight for it, why had he not returned and taken it years ago? Puzzled, waiting for the stranger to reveal himself in further slips, Kak sat grave as a judge, silent as a stone.

Gerry was wiping the sweat from his bruised face, trying to bind his torn shirt about him. He was so upset that he missed Kak's belligerent attitude, as he had missed the trapper's break. Nick marked it, though. He read what was passing in the native's mind and gave himself to swift, unreasonable dislike. This Eskimo and his devil dog were a couple to beware of.

Led on by adroit remarks and comments, Gerry

had soon told One-Eye the whole of his inheritance, the discovery of the revolver, their trade with Alunak, and their hasty journey to reach the wireless at Eagle. Unfortunately for Kak's peace of mind, the trapper made no admissions. If he had known the facts before, it could not be guesed from his absorbed interest. "Nobody shouldn't never talk," was one of his maxims, rarely broken unless cupidity or rage drove him on.

In turn Nick painted a terribly convincing picture of the Klondikers deserting, rafts and boat pushed off, goods flung aboard, scared, soulless humankind manning the floats like monkeys—scared monkeys —flying from extinction. Back of it all, unmentioned but clearly defined, lay the splendid vision of himself remaining alone on the shore.

He followed this with a detailed account of the sick man's death, his last words breathed into a friend's ear: " 'My love to her,' he says, 'my love to her, and to the shaver.' " Nick's touch was about as delicate as a stone mason's. He spread devotion over friendship with a trowel, and, as a finish, offered to show Gerry his father's grave. "Dug with these here fists, mind you. I was the sexton and the parson—I was the whole darned funeral."

Silently they defiled through the doorway and walked across the clearing, Kak following with his rifle. Signs of the trapper's recent look at the place, when they heard him rustling in the bushes before going down to the river, showed plainly. Brush grew so thickly on all sides, however, it was impossible to tell if the ground had been disturbed

so many years ago. From what they could see Nick might have invented the whole story. But truth even in the mouth of a liar carries conviction. One-Eye was telling the truth about the body lying under that patch of earth, and even Kak felt it. He recognized something touching in the big fellow's earlier pilgrimage to his friend's grave and in that moment almost forgave him. It was only seeing Gerry carried so completely off guard that kept the Eskimo watchful.

On the way back to the cabin the white man, talking over his shoulder, suggested their taking Nick down river with them as a witness. Kak rejected the scheme. Gerry pressed it.

"But why not? His evidence will be invaluable."

"You don't need him. We've got plenty of proofs that are easier to handle than him." This sally raised a laugh, for both white men chose to ignore its barb.

"We ought to have Nick along," Gerry persisted. "Think how he stuck to my dad! Mother would like to talk to him. She'd like to hear the story from his own lips."

"You can tell her."

"I can't tell it the same way."

Suddenly Kak wanted to laugh. He had a misgiving that the chief hero might not tell it quite the same way another time himself.

Gerry dropped back for a private word. He spoke eagerly, turning a shining face to Kak, a face full of the amazing emotions of the last half hour, kindled, burning.

"Let's have him! It will be great fun. The man must know lots of things. He can tell us stories all the way down."

In the light of that sentence Kak saw himself as others saw him—a very dull companion for an intelligent, educated chap like Raikes. The implication of his failure hurt horribly. Wounded pride and jealous love made him answer, "All right—take Martin. But I don't go on any raft with such a hot-head! First thing you know the man will get mad and chuck you into the river."

Gerry guffawed, without moving Kak's resolve.

"If he goes, I stay. You can have your choice," the native said in a loud, angry voice that carried to Nick and set him thinking savagely.

The sailor was not prepared to risk going so far alone with a violent-tempered stranger; besides, to separate would be to serve Kak scurvily. So he dropped the argument. His next remark was a salve to his chum's feelings.

"Do you suppose Nick would write his story and sign it?" he asked quite humbly.

"Of course he would! He'd do anything as long as I hold this gun on him."

For the first time Gerry observed the direction of the native's rifle and was shocked. "Kak!"

"We can't afford to take chances," came the stubborn reply. Kak's gaze remained on the trapper. "Better safe than sorry," he was thinking to himself.

"I'll write his story on the back of the map," Raikes said. "Why, where is the map?" He rum-

maged fiercely among the shreds of his shirt. "It's not in my pocket. The button's torn clean off. The paper must have dropped out while we were fighting!"

Gerry ran forward, bounced into the house and began searching in what was left of the mangy grass on the floor. Nick joined him and they hunted everywhere. A few shreds of paper were all they could find, corners, tiny bits. "It's gone! It's gone!" the boys kept on repeating. "It must have been ground to powder by our feet."

Gerry's voice held more wonder than grief. His was distinctly the attitude of a man with two strings to his bow. Nick endeavored to hide his own concern. He turned peevishly sarcastic and suggested: "Maybe the dog ate it."

At this poor joke Kak gave the speaker a keen glance. His eyes had not been off the trapper once since they stopped fighting, yet he felt that somehow the giant had secured that folded paper and that he was ready to blame anything, even a dog, to turn suspicion from himself On the other hand, there were the few limp fragments in Gerry's fingers to argue the map's destruction.

"Well, we needn't worry," the sailor said cheerfully. "I'll have plenty for two, old scout."

To this overture for peace Kak answered coolly: "You may not have any if we hang about here much longer. It's almost dark. We ought to have been on our way long ago."

Gerry picked up the Bible, which he had fortunately left near the rucksack and protected by its

bulk. On the lower half of the flyleaf he wrote what he considered a perfectly honest statement of facts: "I, Nicholas Martin, saw my partner, Cuthbert Raikes, die of smallpox in camp on the banks of the Bell River." This he presented to Nick for signature.

One-Eye made no objections. The disappearance of the map had awakened new emotions. He believed Kak had secured the treasure and was planning to use it for himself after Raikes' departure. The boy's success would mean his failure. Nick felt sure the Eskimo had seen through his story. He knew what was going to happen. Kak would hunt up Alunak, get the truth, and pursue him relentlessly in his friend's name. Kak spoke the Nagyuktok dialect, he remembered. All those eastern tribes had been addicted to blood feuds. Kak would chase him out of the district and out of the country in order to prevent him from telling what he knew about the jade.

As he reviewed the day's events his animosity against the native waxed. Kak had spied on him first. Kak had wanted to know why he would not enter the log house—a dangerous question. Kak owned the devilish pup that had nearly bitten off his ear. Kak was prejudicing him in Gerry's eyes by keeping him under guard. The Eskimo had prevented him from going down river on the raft. Nick would not have lifted a finger against Gerry on such a trip. His life was too precious. The giant might, however, have managed to get rid of his enemy, Kak, by night or in the rapids. The posi-

tion of sole guide and adviser to the young heir would have suited him very well. He had good cause, therefore, to hate Kak; but he masked his hatred with a grin.

Smilingly Nick signed the testimony with a stump of a pencil, in an angular hand stiff from disuse. Then he bade the travelers good-by.

The boys had no notion how far they were from the raft, but they could always find their way back upstream. Nick depended on a marked woods trail for guidance and must hurry if he was to reach his camp before utter darkness shrouded the forest.

Gerry handed the stranger his knife and shouldered his rifle as he left the house. Crossing the clearing, Nick felt that Kak was still standing in the doorway covering him. He did not need a last glance backward, camouflaged by a jaunty wave of the hand, to assure him of that. The native's attitude was casual but unmistakable. Nick's anger leaped.

Evening had closed in already. The light was so deceiving that from the other side of the clearing it would have been hard to tell one boy from the other. Gerry stood in front of Kak, waving gayly. They waited until the trapper vanished from sight and then stepped inside to pick up their trophies.

Night was commencing its concert in a medley of separate noises, harmonious and disconnected as the preliminary tuning of orchestra strings. Chipmunks still chattered incessantly. The wind had risen and sighed through the spruce trees. An owl screamed. The evening scents exhaled from the earth seemed

to be part of this homely chorus. Together the sounds carried a feeling of safety and well-being, blended with anticipation.

Gerry slapped Kak on the back jubilantly. "We are fixed now, old scout, fine as a fiddle! There can't be any question of this evidence. You're coming along all the way with me to witness Nick's signature. Ride in a railroad train—eh? How does that strike you? Glory hallelujah! What a day it's been!"

"I guess the gun's yours?" Kak said, laying aside his own rifle to take up the rusted Winchester.

"Not a bit of it! We agreed to 'finders keepers' and that stands. I've got the Bible here in what's left of my shirt, and you have the gun. All set? Righto! Let's march."

They stepped outside into the cold twilight immediately preceding dark. Gerry with a full holster on each hip, and Kak bearing a rifle over each shoulder, the boys looked like a couple of pirates armed to the teeth.

"Cloudy," said Kak, glancing upward. "But gusty, also. We'll have a moon by streaks and can——"

The sentence was cut by a sharp report. Fire blinked on the edge of the clearing.

Treachery! Ah!

The Eskimo turned savage. It was too dark for anything approaching good aim, but he dropped the Winchester with a clatter. Both hands reached to swing his loaded rifle into place. The white man's revolvers were already spitting death. A form shot

like a living streak out of the dusk behind them—Kanik going into battle. His master yelled. A second blot of light burned against the black woods, over farther—to the left—burned and vanished.

Crack!

As Kak's gun leaped to the new mark, Gerry staggered. His foot slipped and he fell heavily at his friend's feet.

Kak emptied his rifle in the direction of that final spurt of flame and, drawing no return fire, dropped on his knees by his chum. He was only vaguely conscious of events. One-Eye might be dead, or have quit, or be laying for him. He didn't care much which it was. The man had done his worst. For the moment grief outran all thought of vengeance. With Gerry dead the native felt he would as soon a bullet found him too.

He bent over his friend. He called: "Gerry, Gerry!"

The white man lay unconscious. His heart was beating. Blood flowed freely from a wound in his head. Kak did not know what to do, how to stop the bleeding. "You cannot put a tourniquet around a man's neck," he thought despairingly. At the present rate it looked as if Nick's victim would bleed to death.

Had their positions been reversed Gerry would probably have given the sufferer up for lost. But Kak remembered Taktuk's gash across the forehead, so frightful in appearance, yet from which he had made a good recovery. This glimpse out of the past fortified him with hope. He cut away the remainder

of Raikes' shirt, removed the Bible to his own body for safety, then slit the flannel into strips, and bound up the wound as best he could, stopping occasionally to call in softly penetrating, pleading tones: "Gerry, old pal. Gerry, Gerry!"

The reiterated syllables sighed through the forest like a dirge. Spruce boughs rustled against each other dismally, a fitting accompaniment to such eerie wails: "Gerry—Gerry!" Kak's voice choked.

At last the bandaging was done. The Eskimo stood up. Not a sound from any living creature broke the night. Swiftly his mind cleared. He became conscious of a great blank—Kanik! What had become of Kanik? He called. This cry vibrated with sharp, anxious tension—a demanding quality very unlike the lament for his chum.

"Kanik!"

Fear and heartbreak were in it. "Kanik!" The voice roughened with horror.

Never before had Kak sent that call over the country without presently seeing a furry form bounding toward him. The utter stillness of the clearing drove truth home. Kanik had dashed into the line of fire. Kak's rage when Gerry fell had driven everything else out of his head. Forgetful of his pet he had emptied his gun into the forest.

"Kanik!" he called again, but despair stifled the sound.

Utterly desolate, Kak stood in that fatal clearing, ringed round by blackness—darkness of night and darkness of spirit. He hesitated. He wanted to

look for his dog. But somehow it didn't seem fair to Gerry—the unconscious, dependent, suffering Gerry—not to get him away out of that while the chance offered.

The native knew his worst misgivings justified. Nick was a liar—a prince of liars! He had never loved Cuthbert Raikes. He was after the fortune. A dozen possibilities fluttered the lad's mind. Had Nick managed to steal the map of the mountain of jade? Had he intended to kill them both and make off with the prize? Or had he intended to kill only one—and leave the other stranded? The horror of such revenge made Kak shiver. He wished he knew what had happened over there where the trees stood so thickly black. If One-Eye were still alive he might be planning more wickedness. Suppose he went upstream and stole the raft—and their supplies!

The Eskimo felt almost sure Nick had been trying to kill him so that he would have Gerry in his power. Well, he had not yet succeeded in robbing Gerry. Nobody was going to rob Gerry—nor cheat him out of his own through spite, either.

Suddenly the need of getting under way swept the paralysis of fear from the boy's muscles. He gazed about. The moon, freed at that moment from clouds, laid a band of silver across the ground. It showed Kak his chum's face turned up to the patch of starry sky and white as fog under the tan. His naked shoulders, clotted with blood, had a bluish tinge of old ice. The body seemed painfully small, thin as a piece of paper fluttered down into the

well of that dark forest. Kak touched it, lifted its dead weight.

Praying to the Christian God that no life-wasting river of blood would gush forth, the husky native heaved that marble form on to his shoulders, and, bent almost double under the burden, staggered around the end of the brush to the edge of the river.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### NIGHT AND THE RAPIDS

KAK stood at the river's edge, one live atom in a universe of space and menace.

Moonlight rained down on the water—cold, hard, indifferent—equally ready to reveal him to his enemy or aid him in making his way to the raft. The river, gleaming bright as beaten metal, spread between black lines of trees flattened by darkness till they lost all form and individuality.

The world lay, to all intents and purposes, absolutely silent. A stealthy lapping of the current on a log in the stream and the rustle of the spruce boughs blended in harmony so monotonous that they practically effaced themselves. The occasional howl of a wolf inland belonged to the scene also. It was menace made vocal, just as the unsympathetic, brilliant moonbeams were menace made visible.

Kak, relaxing after effort, sensed all about him strangeness and motion. Contrasted with the deadness of Gerry's body, where animation should have played, the still water seemed to be rushing swiftly, the tree limbs to be tossing frantically. The stars above him swarmed and whirled. Now it was black up there, now light, now dark again. He felt queer.

The boy knelt on the log and plunged his face into the stream. He had seen Gerry do this "to wake himself up." He came out of the cold water clear-headed and realized that he had not eaten for hours. Physical exertion and excitement had wasted his strength. He longed to give in then and there, let fate take its course, to sit down by his wounded friend and wait till morning. Kak shook himself. This would never do. He must get back to the raft quickly. Raikes kept a bottle of disinfectant and a roll of bandages somewhere among the things. Perhaps these would save his life.

The Eskimo did not know how far he would have to make his way up-river, nor what kind of going it would be. He dare not attempt to carry his chum. He must leave the wounded man, bring the raft down-river, and stop for him.

At this necessity—leaving Gerry—the one dominant sound of the night leaped out of darkness. Wolves howled. Leaving his friend unguarded was a risk—a horrible risk! Yet one he must take. At least he need not leave him naked. He peeled off his own fur smock and tenderly drew it over the chilled shoulders.

Kak looked about to find some landmark conspicuous enongh to indicate the landing from the river. Two tall trees stood side by side at his right hand. The native concluded he must watch for those twin sentinels and bring the raft in slightly above them. He now began to look for shelter. The large tree trunks sprang from the earth fairly close. He found their stout roots intertwining below with the com-

fortable sag of a sailor's hammock, while the moss-covered ground filled their curve like a bed of rugs. In this little bed he laid Gerry, hoping that the big trees would shelter him from any prying eye. A wolf, of course, would get his scent. But a man—Nick, for instance—if he should come there could only hunt what his eye detected.

Clouds were banking in the lower sky. Kak gathered up his rifle, cast a final look toward the landmark, and set off at a smart pace, intent on making the most of the moonlight while it lasted.

Hurrying on over rocks and scrub, along flat mud banks, making a forced march through unbroken country in semi-light, forbids thought. Kak did not spend his strength in worrying. What was done was done. He put all his energy into his pace.

Once the river bent at a sharp angle, the land running out from it in a sand spit. Had he been forewarned the traveler could have gained time there by cutting across. The effort wasted in going around that long elbow made him gnash his teeth. The journey seemed full of such mistakes and annoyances. It must have taken fully twice the time it should have, but still he came on the raft far sooner than he expected.

With a stifled shout of joy, Kak saw the clumsy thing, tied as they had left it, now swung in close to the shore by the slow current.

All the way up-river he had been fighting a sense of disaster, steeling himself against the possibility of Nick having made off with the raft. At finding it safe and finding it so soon, relief unmanned him.

Going back for Gerry would be nothing. While hunting they had struck inland and when following Nick had evidently retraced their steps, coming out again at almost the same place. What a white man would call maybe a quarter or half a mile meant to Kak the same place.

This piece of luck roused the native's hope. All would be well now. Gerry must be safe, for the wolves—the enemies he most feared—had been heard only in the distance. It seemed very unlikely that any of them would yet have had time to molest a sleeper on the river bank.

With rekindled energy Kak untied the ropes and poled out into the stream. He was naked above the waist and shivered as the cold air struck him. The clouds had moved up, obscuring the moon. The wind was gusty. It felt like rain.

Once under way the exhausted native stopped long enough to open a can of corned beef, then he went at it again, poling with one hand and munching from the other—a strange figure drifting ghost-like on the obscured waters. Night lay all around him, very black now, making it difficult to discern anything in that mourning band along the river's edge. He had to keep as close to the shore as possible, peering sharply for the twin sentinels, for even the treetops were but faintly outlined against the lowering sky. He strained his eyes to see that flat strip of beach on the near side of the tall trunks.

Kak was a clever youth and well educated in the lore of the wilds, but he was only human. After

the excitements and fatigues of such a day it seemed inevitable that he must make a mistake. Constantly watching for the landmark distracted his gaze from the river. He forgot the elbow, forgot the long sand spit running out from it.

The break in the tree line suddenly revived memory. Kak smiled, thinking how unnecessarily anxious he had been. With no need to watch the shore until after this point, he might have relaxed and rested. He could still rest for a short way. The boy sat down and secured his pole beside him. He lay down.

Suddenly he became aware that locomotion had ceased. He looked around. The whole world seemed to have stopped. Was this another trick of his fancy? He stared into the dark water. No, it was true. Bits of flotage were sailing by. Without warning bump or tremor the raft had ceased to move. Stranded!

Kak tested the water with his pole. Although not deep, it should have been deep enough to carry him over the sand spit. He examined his position as well as he could in the darkness, and realized that the raft was riding very low. Evidently the fallen trees which they had gathered on the beach up above and pressed into use had water-logged and were deepening the draft of his floating platform.

He jumped into the water and gave the heavy thing a sidewise tug, expecting that, when relieved of his weight, it would float off easily. It did not move. He took both hands and bent his back to the job. Still he could not budge the raft. He climbed

aboard, tested the depth of the water on the down side, and found it deeper there. That surprised him. A fallen tree must have been swept down-river and grounded at the spit, its upper side filling with sand. If the ridge of this barricade had caught him he thought perhaps he could tilt the raft over. He heaved on the edge. That proved no use. He twisted and turned the raft, but it would not swing free. The broken stump of a branch, probably, had got wedged between the logs.

Kak could not swim. He was afraid of the water, afraid to venture on the deep side where there might be holes. From every angle on the shallow side he heaved and yanked and pushed. But all the concentrated force in his body failed to budge the plaguy thing. At first the delay had angered him. Now fear of not being able to move the raft at all reduced him to despair. He climbed out and threw himself down, burying his face on his arms. His predicament was horrible, but he thought of it in terms of Gerry's predicament. Added to his chum's physical danger there was the chance of his regaining consciousness, finding himself alone, and thinking himself abandoned. That might drive a wounded man to anything! Knowing Gerry better now than in the days when they had been lost floating on the ice cakes, he realized how the sailor had then looked to his revolver as his best friend. Gerry's revolver was ready on his hip. Kak had reloaded all their arms before leaving the cabin.

The Eskimo lay naked to his waist with the remains of a river night breeze chilling his flesh.

His feet were deadly cold from being in the water, for his old skin boots leaked like a sieve. He felt so tired—so done. He thought he would build a fire and wait until morning. Maybe then he could see what was holding the raft back. He sat up to look for wood—and a loud laugh, eerie as a loon's laugh, echoed through the forest. Cold or not cold, Kak knew a better use for a fireplace than to warm himself. How dumb he had been!

Plop! plop! plop! went the firestones, one by one, into the river. The raft lightened perceptibly. It swung in the current. The native leaped off, braced his feet as well as he could on the soft bottom, and gave a terrific shove. The raft shot forward with such unexpected speed that it almost escaped him. Fearfully Kak clutched the barked ends of the logs, all slippery and water-soaked, and clung for dear life. He trailed into the deeper water, kicking like a drowning pig, swinging on his stomach over the sharp edge, finally drawing himself aboard.

Shivering, dripping wet, Kak seized his pole and worked fiendishly, trying to make up the time lost by his own stupidity. From the river elbow he could see those tall twin trees like tent poles holding up the cloudy roof. He swung the raft in short of them in silence—heavy, unmolested peace. He blessed the quiet that portended safety as he ran to Gerry's side.

Gerry was lying exactly as he had been left, his head turned a trifle to one side and supported on a pillow of moss. The rescuer could have hoped for nothing better. Yet his joy was shadowed.

Unconfessed to himself he had been thinking he might find Kanik on the scene. Love reasoned that the dog might have been wounded, lamed perhaps, and have limped to the river, following their trail. Faced now with the prospect of abandoning his pet altogether, the master wished that he could have known he was dead. The alternative of Kanik suffering, Kanik maimed and falling prey to a wolf, was too terrible to contemplate.

The Eskimo was tempted to leave Raikes again and go into the forest beyond the clearing, looking for his dog. But it was pitch black under the trees. He could not have seen his hand before his face, and time pressed.

One of Kak's strongest points was that he rarely failed to learn from experience. He knew the rest of the trip down river was going to be terribly difficult. Stranding on the sand spit had opened his eyes to the dangers ahead and to some of the many ways in which he would miss an active partner.

Single-handed now, with a sick man, an unconscious man to tend, and on a water-logged raft, he must undertake a trip that McTaggart had dreaded for them under the best circumstances. Seriously handicapped for time, every instinct bade Kak get away at once—every emotion but one. Affection chained him to the spot so long as he could square delay with his conscience.

He set about methodically lightening the raft, discarding every inch of material they could do without. The silk handkerchiefs purchased by Gerry for use as money came in well to tie up pack-

ages of tea, sugar, and other provisions, for they had been carrying extra heavy loads to trade with possible Indians. Kak liked luxuries, but he could live without them for a week or so. He took barely sufficient for Gerry's use. The big bag of flour he rolled in the tarpaulin. Without the fireplace he could not use it, so what was the good of taking it along? Bacon can be eaten raw and canned beans are palatable cold. They would manage to live.

The sight of Raikes' emergency kit tempted him to re-dress the wounded head before starting. But he recognized that as love's temptation and sternly put it behind him. Cutting off the dirty shirt, however, pouring disinfectant over the long bullet track that had gouged Gerry's scalp away right across one side, and binding clean bandages about it, were the first things he did when they were well afloat. After that he did nothing for a while. He covered his chum with furs, rolled himself in a bearskin, and lay down to sleep.

Sleep would not come. Scene after scene, the day's happenings marched through his memory. They were not events calculated to soothe. The native had known plenty of fighting and bloodshed and rarely before had he been unable to sleep. Sorrow fretted him. He was leaving half his heart behind in the forest, while the other half ran ahead in fear. The darkness oppressed him without closing his eyelids. The air was almost too still to breathe. He panted for his uplands and his open spaces. But gradually warmth lulled the jangled nerves. He grew drowsy. He slept.

A jarring scrunch wakened Kak. He stared up at the sky, forgetful, at first, till memory of his troubles and disasters crowded back. After the panic of the woods, the silent river seemed blessedly at peace. The boy lay flat on his back gazing up at the clouds, relaxed, listening. A soft rustling sound filled his ears. He thought it was the wind in the spruce boughs. It was a slumber sound and made him loath to move. As the raft drifted on the river Kak's mind went out on seas of fancy—drifting. The rustle-rustle was the boat song of his dreams. It grew louder. "I'm sleeping," he told himself when its noise had reached a volume beyond belief.

"We must be too near shore!" The second mental impulse shot through Kak like a thunderbolt.

He sat up suddenly, and even in the act realized that no ordinary wind among treetops could bring the pressure of that sound. The absence of any breeze struck him with uncanny dread. He peered through the darkness. They were well in mid-stream. For a moment, until his wits cleared themselves from trailing wraiths of fatigue, he was at a loss. His eyes could scarcely define the trees. He strained his vision. Judged by those distant landmarks the river must be going at a gallop instead of its familiar crawl.

Kak's first reaction to this sense of speed was happiness. "Making time at last!" he thought. Then knowledge dawned in terror. That mysterious hoarse chorus was the voice of rushing water. They were galloping in death's direction, sweeping

down some rapids, tearing along through darkness—helmless, helpless, utterly in the river's power.

He had been facing upstream, now he turned to look ahead. The metallic sheen of water and the dull opaqueness of the sky were divided by a line of white. Waves! Kak thought it resembled a mouth full of teeth, grinning. When he was close enough to see the breakers curling around great rocks he changed his metaphor to a giant licking his lips.

The raft banged with a yielding shock similar to the bang that had wakened the native. They had struck a deadhead—a tree water-logged and stuck by one end in the muddy river bottom. The current was perpetually yanking it as if it would yank it out by the roots—but it never succeeded. The raft bumped off from the heavy timber to one side. A couple of large stones seemed to spring at Kak out of the night. He gaped. To crash on these meant certain death. He held his heart from beating. Just in time the current seized the raft and whipped it around the rocky ledge. A final corner striking on the hard stone face set the whole business whirling. Gerry's body shot across the slippery logs. With a cry Kak flung out one arm, caught the unconscious weight, and drew it back. It was a narrow escape. The Eskimo crawled over, straddled a knee on either side of Gerry, and held him thus. For his own safety he depended on the grip with which his lacerated hands clung to the wet logs.

On they rushed, swerving and spinning. Kak felt dizzy. Between the up and down of waves and

the rotary motion caused by bumping off this and cannoning against that, his wits reeled. His muscles ached. His soul ached from appalling terror of the awful fate that seemed to rise up and beckon him on every hand.

If he could have seen an inch ahead, used his pole, tried to steer, it would not have been so bad. But the aimless plunging, the swooping of strange masses into their course, the dodging—this whole game of hide and seek with death reduced his courage to a pulp. He had given himself up for lost so many times his nerves grew dulled at last and it seemed they might come through alive.

No sooner had hope raised its head than a terrific crash threw Kak's hold right off the timbers. He grabbed back instantly, but in the concussion he and Gerry and their goods had shifted maybe five feet on the logs. The downstream end of the raft had stuck fast. It swung broadside to the current and bumped along over several bowlders. Kak was beginning to realize he was still alive, when it stopped. Slowly the upstream edge began to rise as if the whole raft were about to topple over.

The moment called for quick action. Kak found his nerve. He shoved Gerry up the incline, grabbed a sack of their goods with one hand, and clinging with the other, he drew himself and the sack to the rising end. Their combined weight proved sufficient to shift the balance. The up side fell back, lifting the down side so that the raft floated off.

This was a lesson to Kak. Facing a new kind of

danger had routed his nerve. He had been panic-stricken and the very stupidity of his fear might have caused his own death and Gerry's. In the thick of the turmoil of waters he had found himself again. He felt ashamed, shook off his craven terror, and sat up, alert for action and emergency.

Night seemed to grow darker. The steely monster gnashed its teeth and foamed about him. The wash of waves was in his ears, the hiss of spray falling back on the lashing river, the booming of the current, and the bumping of the raft.

Several times Kak's ship struck and heaved upward, and he had to lug the cargo aft, where he would sit in tense anxiety watching the high end sink and the raft right itself. The strain on the ropes binding the logs together was so furious that he now began to worry for fear they might break and let the thing go to pieces. He dare not take his eyes off the roaring current, and the strange forms rushing at them out of the cavernous dark, to look for weak places. But it seemed impossible that any rope could endure the fierce onslaught of the whirling waters.

## CHAPTER XIX

### FRIENDS IN CAMP

MIDWAY through the last and most hazardous of these encounters Gerry came to life. He opened his eyes wide, staring up at the opaque darkness. Kak was stooped double over the gear, every nerve strained to move the dunnage bags. The raft had caught harder and deeper this time, and the upstream edge continued rising. Gerry's weight was a straw, the cargo proved little better. Kak had to crawl to the top of that alarming incline and lay his own weight along the very edge of the logs before the point of gravitation changed. As the platform slowly righted he wriggled back to safety near Gerry, and when they swung loose, he jumped across the prostrate body and began moving the load to the center again. Finally he caught Gerry's shoulders and dragged him back.

"Hey!"

That feeble protest made joy leap in the Eskimo's heart. All his cardiac muscles seemed to relax and expand.

"Hey, yourself!" he answered, peering into the open eyes. "Are you all right now?"

"I've got the dickens of a headache and a sound of rushing in my ears."

"Yes, I'll bet you have a headache—souvenir from that noble white man, Martin!"

"Eh?"

"You were shot. I got you away, though. We're on the raft. That rushing in your ears is the river. We've been whirling down rapids for ever so long —pounding around on the stones—rough enough to wake a dead man. Say, I've been scared! Every way I've been scared stiff. I was afraid you'd gone and died on me. But now you're all right——"

"I can't do anything to help."

Kak observed then that Gerry had not moved. "Aren't you all right?" he asked anxiously.

"My head——"

"Never mind. Just lie quiet. I'll look at your head as soon as it's light. If the raft begins to up end, wriggle toward the high side while I shift the bags. That will help—that's all either of us can do. The noise seems to be lessening. If the old ropes hold out——" He stopped. "By George, the noise is less!"

Kak sat silent, attentive. The sense of swift motion continued, but there seemed to be no more rocks or sharp corners. In a little while the raft was floating tranquilly down smooth water. Dawn had stolen on them as the seething of the rapids faded into the distance. When Kak looked again he saw his chum distinctly and almost shrieked.

The white man's eyes were closed. All the blood in his face seemed to be on the skin, and the iodine poured hastily over his wound had run down, leaving yellow streaks. As the native stared at this

ghastly mask he realized the stains were harmless and relief made him laugh.

Gerry opened his eyes. "What's funny?"

"You are. Listen to the fish jumping all around us. Word has been sent out that you're a sight and they're coming up to take a look."

"I wish I could have one for breakfast."

"So you can. Hunger is a good sign. When a man wants to eat he's pretty nearly all right."

A wan shadow of the Raikes sporting spirit flickered in Gerry's eyes. "Bet you can't catch one!"

"You'll have fish for breakfast, don't worry." Kak was already poling out of the swift current. He took up his rifle. "Even if I don't hit the fish, the explosion in the water will stun them so that I can grab one in my fingers," he explained.

The report of the gun going off made Gerry flinch. His hands flew to his head. "Goodness sake! Don't do it again, kid. I'd rather go without eating forever."

Kak was lying flat on his stomach, searching for the nearest victim. Twilight showed him the gleam of their white bellies. The fish were plentiful and he pulled out two without any trouble and held them up in triumph.

The Eskimo would just as soon have eaten the fish raw, but knowing the tastes of white men he began to pole to shore.

"What are you after now?"

"Going to cook the fish."

"But—what's wrong with the fireplace?"

"Overboard."

That set Gerry asking a dozen questions with his eyes, so Kak started in to tell him a long story of the stranding of the raft and how she was waterlogged, his main idea being to make the passenger forget his pains and aches.

Gerry's gaze wandered during the recital. The light increased moment by moment. Dawn was striding on. A river mist had risen around them. Earth and sky melted together, trackless as the inside of a gigantic gray pearl. Kak's upright figure centered space. All at once Gerry missed something.

"Where's Kanik?" he demanded.

Kak could not control his voice for a moment. The master's silence spoke volumes. "I don't know," he confessed at last. "The pup dashed into the woods. There was shooting. Nick fired. You fired. I fired—Kanik didn't turn up. I had no time to hunt for him at the start, for even if One-Eye had been hit he might have recovered enough to take a pot shot. We were in bright moonlight. When I returned, bringing the raft, clouds had banked up. It was pitch dark then and no use trying to find anything in the forest."

That was that. Kak had lost his dearest earthly possession. Nothing remained to be said. The Eskimo, afraid of crying like a girl, avoided his chum's sympathetic glance and Gerry understood. To himself the white man was thinking: "He had to choose between me and the little dog." A great tenderness was in his heart for his faithful friend.

Kak built a fire on shore and roasted the fish to the king's taste. And Gerry, propped against the dunnage bags, called it the best breakfast he had ever eaten.

"We shouldn't stay here very long, though," he suggested nervously. "We've lost a lot of time."

"Well, think of the speed we made last night."

Dangers once passed sit lightly on young hearts, yet their recent experience had its serious side. "All the same we are going to clear out of here right away," he promised. "Drifting down those rapids in the dark was no fun, let me tell you. And we won't run the risk again. After this we must moor the raft for the short interval of darkness, and take turns sleeping." He gave a great yawn. "The river ahead looks as straight as a spear and as smooth as fresh ice. I'm going to look at your head, and then we'll both tuck up and have a good old snore."

Kak was feeling just a little bit worried about Gerry's wound. Scalps always bleed profusely, he knew, but it seemed strange that Raikes should have lain so long unconscious from the impact of a glancing bullet. He seemed awfully gone now, too. Dreading he knew not what complications, the amateur doctor began his task. Unwinding the bandages proved a sensitive business. Gerry yowled when Kak took hold of the back of his head.

"But it can't hurt there. You were shot on the side," the native explained.

"Was I? Well, I don't feel anything on the side. Ouch! Go easy on the back there, like a good old scout."

Kak examined the sensitive spot and found a large, soft swelling.

"Ah! I guess you hit your head on something pretty hard as you fell. You've got a lovely goose egg, a rare lump, boy. No wonder your head aches!"

Relief made the amateur's voice sound heartlessly glad. Rest and quiet will cure a contusion, and between rapids, Gerry would have nothing else but rest and quiet. When more disinfectant had been applied and the head bound as neatly as it could be with the old bandages, Kak poled into the current again. Once sure that they were gliding along rapidly but smoothly, he stretched himself on the corrugated floor with a deep sigh of content.

"I'm going to sleep forever. Don't you dare to wake me," he admonished, "unless you see a line of breakers chewing up our peace and quiet."

"All right, Rip Van Winkle. Go to it. Take all you can get. You deserve any indulgence that's going. You sure are some fellow in a tight pinch."

Gerry's hand closed around the Eskimo's hard fist. For once Kak was too tired to ask:

"What's ripvanwinkle?"

Kak dreamed of being in a hot, hot country where men sweat without labor or without clothes, where women pick the food from trees. Confused lines of Gerry's songs whisked in and out of his dream: "Where the crocodiles lie sunning on the sand." It brought up heat, vast stretches of sultry

heat such as he had never known. "And the mermaids came and slapped him, with their cooling tails flip-flapped him——"

"Hu-u-u-u-u-uh!" The dreamer woke.

Morning had been chilly when they went to sleep and Kak had wrapped himself in fur robes. Now the noonday sun was burning intolerably, shooting down rays like hot iron, raining them right through the fur. "I'm steaming!" the native cried. "I'm sweltering!" He rolled over, flinging off the covers, and his eyes riveted themselves on the stream.

"I'm hot, too, but I can't get this smock off. I didn't notice before that you'd lent it to me. You are a good chap, Kak."

The Eskimo had no attention to spare for thanks just then. Directly ahead a small black object was riding the water like a buoy. He watched silently. The object took on form as they approached. Kak's heart began to flutter. The black thing was a bark canoe anchored in mid-river while its red-skinned owner fished. Their last encounter with humankind had scarcely turned out in a way calculated to establish confidence. Kak felt disinclined for any more scrapping. His racial prejudice asserted itself for a moment and he turned to Gerry apprehensively.

"There's a fellow ahead there—fishing. Looks like an Indian." His tone added, "What next?"

The white man with a quick effort sat up. He raised a weak "Halloo!"

"Hist!"

"Gosh! It's the greatest luck. You know what McTaggart said. If we met Indians they might take us down the rapids in their canoes."

"But he may be bad—another Nick Martin."

"Don't judge Indians by white men who have gone amuck, Kak. It isn't fair. He may be 'plenty good' and 'plenty useful.' Hail him."

Thus urged Kak stood and sent a loud shout down river. The fisherman looked up, saw them, and immediately commenced to hoist his anchor. In his bobbing, little bark canoe that looked uncommonly like a kayak, though not decked in, he paddled to meet the oncoming raft.

"Do you speak English?" Gerry asked as soon as he could make his voice carry.

"Speak him like white man."

The Indian's face remained grave, but his eyes sparkled. He had a very pleased expression.

"Do you know Rampart House?"

"Know him like white man."

"Well, you've got this white man beaten. I don't know the place at all. We're in a hurry to get there, though, and I've had an accident. How far is it? Can you take us down in your canoes?"

The Indian nodded gravely to all these questions. When Gerry, tired from the effort, lay back, he began to talk. His name was Sitting Fox. He and his brother Running Fox, and some other families, were camped about half a mile down the river around the next bend. He was a man of few words and no promises. But he ventured the opinion that

either he or Running could take the white man on to Rampart House. Cordially and politely he invited the two strangers to eat with them and talk the matter over.

All this time Sitting had been floating along beside the raft with one hand on it. Now he said he would go and warn his wife and daughter. He pointed out a thin wraith of smoke curling above the trees. Their camp fire. The women would be preparing the midday meal already. With a final assurance that they could not fail to see the camp, as it stood in a clearing right at the water's edge, he shoved off and paddled away.

From start to finish Kak had not uttered a word. His mood was pessimistic.

"I wonder if he will tell us the truth about how long it takes to go to Rampart House. Or if he will be playing pranks like Crow Tail and that bunch."

"No, no! This is a 'plenty good' Indian." Gerry smiled.

"How do you know?"

"Because he doesn't brag about himself. You noticed he did not promise to take us down river, only said he hoped to. He is evidently a man of his word."

Kak grunted. That grunt was the last note of criticism he ever made against Sitting Fox.

Their host had foregathered on the beach with several other Indians when the raft arrived. It seemed to be a prosperous community. Their winter homes were farther down the river, they

explained. For the summer they were camping in tents, some of tanned caribou skin and others of sailcloth, strung along the water front.

Gerry was helped ashore and a comfortable place made for him. Curious faces pressed around. Kak was filled with curiosity himself, conscious of many shy, bright eyes peering from behind the trees. After a while children ventured into the open and stood staring at the strangers. Gerry tried to make friends, but notice embarrassed them, and they popped back into cover as quick as prairie squirrels.

Kak was aware of the women moving about the fires on the open ground back of where they sat. When the first greetings had been exchanged he took a seat on a fallen tree with his back to the river so that he could watch them.

Beyond the first fire, which seemed to be the center of Sitting's camp, stood an amazingly big, fat woman. She was so enormous the practical visitor began to wonder how she had ever got there. She certainly could not have walked, and to think of her in one of the bark canoes was to sink it instantly. Kak smiled. He decided that she must have been brought into the country as a child and allowed to grow up there under the tall spruce trees.

Watching the direction of the Eskimo's glance, Sitting Fox said proudly, "My wife. She not speak English, but she cook good food." Then he added, as a figure came from the woods carrying a pail of water: "That my niece, Tamia. My half sister's

girl. She three-quarters white girl. Been sick, fever, cut off all her hair. She like a boy now."

Kak thought the beauty approaching seemed less a boy than anybody he had ever seen. Her hair was short and curled all over her head like Gerry's. But she was slender, with the look of a fawn in her eyes—her blue eyes! The light splash of those blue eyes across her tanned face was like an arm of the sea reaching between brown, heather-covered hills. Kak had never before met a woman with blue eyes. They made her almost akin to his chum, and he was very fond of his chum.

The girl wore a plain, cotton Mother Hubbard frock, the same as the other women, but over it strings and strings of beads hung about her neck and waist. She walked slowly, bending her supple body away from the pail to balance its weight. Kak wanted awfully to speak to Tamia, but he dared not. He knew that Gerry would have gone to the young woman, taken the bucket out of her hand, and walked along beside her, humming a tune or telling a story. These white men's manners were too much for him, though. He just sat on the fallen log, where all the Indians were talking, and watched her out of the corner of his eye.

It appeared that Running Fox was hunting in the only large canoe. He would return presently and then they could discuss the advisability of taking Gerry down river. By no possibility could they carry three in one canoe. Kak would have to manage for himself. If he was afraid to navigate

the rapids he could walk past them, while his Indian friend towed his canoe. Sitting explained that in the swiftest places it might be necessary for both strangers to walk.

"My brother's canoe pretty big. My wife, she go in him. Any canoe she go in plenty size for two men—but not in rough water."

The Indians smiled, nodded, laughed. They grew more friendly as the meal progressed.

Tamia brought the food and in delightful English expressed her sympathy for the white man's misfortune. Gerry thanked her, and, charmed by her pretty ways, began to tell her the whole story while Kak sat by with burning heart. Sitting Fox finally introduced Tamia. It appeared she was a person of importance. Her father, a trapper and prospector with headquarters at Rampart House, was a rich man. She had been away to school.

One part of the boys' adventure led to another. All the Indians were amazed to hear of the cabin in the woods. They had been up and down the river many times and never discovered a sign of a clearing.

"Well, the house was never finished," Gerry explained. "They must have been working on it when my father died. There had been no time to make paths to the river or any such clews."

For a while Tamia held the center of the stage, then Running Fox was sighted. In the distraction of his arrival she withdrew and sat on the log where Kak had been. He saw her there, worked gradually out of the crowd, and resumed his old place a short

way from the girl. Tamia looked at him sidewise twice invitingly, but Kak was far too embarrassed to take any notice, so finally she had to speak.

"I think you are very brave. Eskimos are very fierce, aren't they? I have never met an Eskimo before."

Brave and fierce! She put new courage into the youth with those words. He turned toward her. "Why, no," he said, "Eskimos aren't fierce. They're a jolly sort of people, always laughing."

"I like Eskimos," she answered.

As he was the only Eskimo she had ever met this compliment came broadside. Kak flushed and moved nearer to her. "Tamia," he said, "I'll make you a present of a handsome secret, and you can get ahead of all the others." Then he told her about the things he had discarded on the shore behind the log house.

Kak was thinking of the flour and tea they had left, but her woman's interest leaped to trivial things.

"Silk handkerchiefs!" she cried and clapped her hand over her mouth with a scared glance around to see if she had given away the secret. She leaned toward him, whispering, "If Uncle Sitting takes the white man down river, I'll make Uncle Running go up river with me. Uncle Running is swell. He'll do anything I want!"

Her soft face suddenly changed, fell into sympathetic lines. She touched the Eskimo's hand with one finger. "We'll go into the woods, Kak, and look for your little dog. I'll find out what happened to

him and let you know when you come back to Rampart House."

When he came back to Rampart House! Kak looked at her, puzzled. His mouth opened to say: "But I'm not returning to Rampart House." Then something in the blue eyes shining so oddly from her swarthy face made him shut it again. How did he know he would never be back in Rampart?

Gerry called that it was time to start. Instead of making any fool remarks Kak grabbed her little hand and gave it a hard squeeze.

"Thanks," he said. "Don't forget."

## CHAPTER XX

### KAK'S DANCE

TUM-tum-tum, tum-tum-tum, tum-tum-tum. Gerry was trying to coax a waltz from a cottage organ, while an earnest Indian beat out the triple time on his native drum—tum-tum-tum, tum-tum-tum.

It was a gala night at Rampart House. Everybody had turned out to celebrate the success of the two romantic voyageurs; for success was now assured to Kak and Gerry. They had made such good time under the guidance of Sitting Fox that they had arrived a couple of days ahead of schedule. Bill Harrison, the trader, hearing their plans, invited them to stay over the extra time with him.

"No use your going on to Fort Yukon," he said. "The up-river boat isn't due there till Wednesday. Stop and cheer us up a bit, boys. It's few enough visitors we have."

Jim Bowman, Tamia's father, seconded the invitation.

It was Jim who conceived the idea of giving an Indian dance for Kak and who carried it through high-handedly. Both boys were eager, but Gerry seemed to get more out of the display than the Eskimo.

All through the lambent dusk of ripe September Indians footed it to the tom-tom's monotonous thump and drone:

*Tu-u-u-um* tum tum, *Tu-u-u-um* tum tum!

Feathers swayed, beadwork rattled. The smell of buckskin, blended with the odor of overheated bodies, rose on the autumn night. Moccasins raised little rills of dust from trodden ground.

*Tu-u-u-um* tum tum!

The inner circle of Indians dancing, the outer circle of Indian elders, children and womenfolks squatting on the ground, was a never-to-be-forgotten scene impressed on the watchers' minds by its queer mixture of strangeness and familiarity. People of all nations dance, and all dances have many traits in common.

Kak felt awed. He mentally reversed his position, imagining one of the hated redskins as spectator of a shamans' séance. How odd it would be thought among his people! He saw himself in the secret places of the enemy and thrilled, half fearfully.

To Gerry, however, the dance was only a first-class show. For a while he stood quiet, then he broke away from the outer ring and joined the braves, dancing opposite Sitting Fox, hopping from one foot to the other, swinging his arms, giving little yaps, like Harry Lauder's famous bark.

The other dancers were delighted. They made signs for Kak to come in also, but the Eskimo shook his head.

Colors flashed. Dark faces shone with heat and

rapture. The earth quivered beneath the heavy tread of stamping feet.

*Tu-u-u-um* tum tum!

Gerry gave out first.

"Too much of that would make the old bean ache," he said, joining Bowman on the side lines. "When they're finished let's have a regular dance—a white man's dance. And then perhaps Kak will show us the Eskimo hornpipe, or the Arctic fandango."

Several of the Indian girls could do a waltz—at least it passed for a waltz—Tamia had taught them. They were proud to show off. Soon the whole party moved inside the trading post. Drinks were served, refreshments, always an important feature in Rampart House parties, passed from hand to hand. Joy seethed and bubbled.

An unforeseen difficulty arose. Gerry could not play the organ and dance, too. Jim and Bill Harrison did their best, but the belles wanting to take part in the white man's dance far outnumbered their possible partners. By and by a line of piqued wallflowers made the atmosphere almost as anxious and uneasy as a Saturday night hop in a girl's boarding school.

Tum-tum-tum, tum-tum-tum, tum-tum-tum—bleated the drum. The cottage organ wheezed in protest.

Suddenly Gerry broke off, swung his legs over the bench, and called on Kak.

Blushing to the roots of his hair the Eskimo took center stage and struck into steps more actively

"savage," wilder than anything so far on the program. He whirled. He plunged. He leaped up and crouched down. He swung his muscular arms wide, and called on the spirits of crows and wolves. Kak had a melodious voice. His cries merged into song. All at once he stopped dancing and gave himself up to a chant—starting on high, sustained notes and falling into deep, vibrating rhythm.

The Indians watched, amazed. Gerry's mouth hung open. He had never seen his friend worked up like this. He had never heard him sing before —not like this. What had happened to the old scout?

Jim nudged Harrison. Both old-timers in the North, they realized that a spirit of savage rivalry animated the Eskimo. He felt the honor of his whole people rested on him and was straining every effort to outdo the Indians' performance.

Kak's voice changed, reached graver depths, rolled from him with the weird solemnity of Alunak's when he had stood alone on the mountaintop and sung those fatal words:

"Kill, kill, kill my enemy, the white man. He who pretended to be my friend. Slay, slay, slay with the stroke of thy power. Drain the strength from his right arm and frost the heat of his anger in the frost of death. Kill, kill, kill my enemy——"

Kak was not chanting the death song, but a song akin to it. He poured out his hatred of One-Eyed Nick in a war challenge—mounting, mounting, till it caught at the hearts of the listeners. Fear gripped even the hardened trader and Jim Bowman.

Absolute silence fell on the crowd. Silence surrounded those wicked, melodious sounds like the golden setting around some death-cursed jewel.

Night had closed in. Through the open door and windows of the trading post, shafts of lamplight pierced the darkness. Wailing notes seemed to chase each other along those brilliant fingers and commit suicide by leaping into the void. Away in the center of the broad, black river two canoes, moving abreast, drew on nearer—nearer. At the first note of the singing their speed increased. Paddles rose, gleamed, plunged—rose and plunged —gleamed and plunged. Twin white ripples lay across the water as their course bent in toward land.

In the bow of the far canoe a dog pricked his ears, strained his muscles, trembled, sniffed, whined. He began to beat a nervous tattoo with impatient paws on the thin bark floor.

"Down, Kanik," said a woman's voice. "Down." Then to a man beside her: "He'll have me upset. Down, Kanik. That is strange music."

"The Eskimo——"

"His master—yes. Quiet, Kanik. Quiet—quiet —quiet." She stilled the eager animal through the spell of her voice, as a mother sings an ailing child to sleep.

"Steady, Kanik, steady."

The canoe swept to the shore. Before its bow had touched the sand Kanik was a bounding streak —visible across gray water, lost against black brush.

Kak tore the final note of his challenge out of

the roots of his being—and stopped dramatically. There was a scuffling among the legs of standing men grouped at the door, and a furry creature flung itself against the singer's chest—leaping, falling back, leaping higher, trying to lick the beloved face.

The Eskimo, wrought upon by the violence of his own singing, lapsed into native superstition. For a moment he thought he had invoked the spirit of his pet out of some hinterland of lost souls. The next, tears were streaming down his cheeks. He cried like a child as he hugged the dog to him and called his name, "Kanik! Kanik! Kanik!"

The Indians stood amazed at this unmanly show of emotion. But Kak didn't care a particle. He was all Eskimo just then. All Kanik's. Tears and licking, hugging and tears continued until the dog had had enough. Twisting out of his master's embrace he sprang at Gerry.

And now Running Fox passed through the ring of spectators, with Tamia at his heels.

The splash of those light-blue eyes in the dark face brought Kak to his senses. Her smile, her handshake, her merry greeting were all too much. He could say nothing, not even thanks. He stood and grinned and wiped his tears so openly that Tamia felt like crying for sympathy.

"I guess there's no doubt about that being your dog," Sitting Fox said.

"He's the cussedest, faithfulest pup I've ever seen," Running volunteered.

"Yes, he is!" Tamia broke in with her excited story.

"When we saw him crouched by the cache you had left on the river bank I was glad—glad for your happiness and also because he looked such a nice little dog and all his troubles were going to end. But was he a nice dog? Did he let his troubles end? Not at all. He turned out to be a growling, fierce beast. Would he allow me to take the tea and silk handkerchiefs you had made me a present of? He would not! He snapped and he snarled. He flew at us. Not a bark, mind you, not a fang showing for the strangers till they tried to touch his master's things—then—wow!"

"I thought we would have to shoot him."

"Uncle!" Tamia looked her horror and reproof in a flash of blue fire. "We never thought of shooting him, Kak! I would have waited there to coax him had it taken me a week."

"I wonder what happened to you, doggie?" The master was feeling all over his pet for wound or scar. "Why ever didn't you come when I called?"

There was apparently no mark on the dog and that question led to much argument. Everybody had a different opinion to offer. But Kak finally worked out the misadventure to suit himself:

"Nick kicked you or stunned you, poor chap. And when you gathered your wits again you must have struck the wrong scent. You followed our hunting trail all the way into the forest and out again. By the time you reached the place where the raft lay I had taken it off downstream. And so you turned around and ran all the way back through the woods and around the clearing to the

other end of the trail. There you found the things I had left on the shore. So you said: 'This is a cache, my master will return this way,' and you sat down to guard it. Good old boy!"

"Suppose we had not gone back after those things, would you have starved to death, little doggie?" Tamia asked.

"I guess you saved his life for me," Kak answered, looking at her ardently. But the company disagreed.

A dozen voices disputed the question. "No, the dog would have been all right."

"He could have foraged for himself."

"All right unless he met a wolf."

"Well, he would have met a wolf sooner or later, so she did save his life."

"Never can tell—he might have got off——"

"He was fierce enough when we found him," Running Fox said. "We decided to go up into the woods and see what had happened beyond the clearing. And that seemed to interest the pup. First thing I knew he was padding along after us."

"What did you find?"

Both boys hung on the Indian's words. Had Nick got away to grab the jade?

"One or other of you killed a man in there—a white man. We found a body mauled by wolves and buried the remains. He was a big fellow."

"One-Eye."

It was not a question, but the Indian answered gruesomely: "I couldn't tell."

"Served him right," said Kak, after a pause.

Gerry's face had fallen into a troubled frown. "I wonder why he shot at us? I thought he was my father's friend." The boy had been reasoning aloud, now he appealed to the white men. "Nick tried to grab a map I found—it was a map locating treasure. We fought for it, but later on we made it up. Before we parted he knew the map had been destroyed. I can't understand it."

"Did you find anything in his pockets?" Kak asked suddenly. "You know, Gerry, I had a kind of sneaking notion he made away with the map in spite of everything and was going to find the mountain of jade——"

Harrison slapped his knee and gave vent to a great guffaw of laughter, ill fitting to the occasion. "Jade, hey! That old yarn again! How often will it turn up?"

"Do you know it? Isn't it true?" the boys cried in one breath. When you have been hugging a secret to yourself it is startling to find out that everybody knows about it. Harrison waved the responsibility aside.

"Ask Jim. He'll tell you. He understands such things."

"Well?"

"It's true enough," Jim Bowman said, tilting his chair back against the wall and lighting his pipe. "There is a lot of the stone about—maybe a mountain of it. I met some fellows once who claimed to have found a goodish bit of jade up on the Kobuk River, far enough away——"

"Northeast?" asked Gerry, eyes popping.

Jim smiled. "I should say, pretty generally speaking, the Kobuk's northwest—with a leetle bias to westward—about a thousand miles from here. The fact is the stuff's not jade at all—not like the Chinese stone. It's American jade—a kind of greenish moss jadite, pretty to look at but nothing out of the way in value. It wouldn't scarcely pay to work a quarry—not in such a remote place."

"Ha, ha! What a sell!" Gerry thumped his partner on the back. "You don't need to worry, Kak. Red gold is good enough at any time and I'll have heaps——"

Kak scowled. "Just the same it isn't fair to pass such tales around. That fellow Nick wanted the jade so badly he nearly killed you to get it."

"Ignorance makes trouble for lots of folks," Jim replied mildly. "Here you two were fairly worried to death for fear you wouldn't catch the boat at Fort Yukon—just because you didn't know what day it sailed."

"And here I was paddling like mad to reach Fort Yukon before you left. Never expected the luck of finding you here. That girl would have made me go on and on till she delivered the little dog."

At Running Fox's words every eye turned on Tamia.

The Indian girl looked beautiful. She was dressed in a sort of leather smock sewed over with beads. Kak had observed that it was superfine work. She tossed her head independently, setting the curls aquiver. "I'm nearly sorry we did find them, uncle.

Think what fun it would have been to go on and on—all the way to England!"

Running Fox threw up his hands.

"But I'm not going to England!" Kak broke in. "I have decided to come back."

Thereupon the young woman smiled very knowingly and shook her head. "You'd better go to England, Kak," she answered. "There are a hundred things to see and do. It's a great chance for you."

Kak felt depressed after that. He thought her wonderful but very inhospitable. Gerry laughed him out of the mood as they undressed.

"It's the white part of her," he explained. "White girls always say yes when they mean no. She likes you, man."

Whatever her meaning, Tamia was still saying yes when the travelers left next day. Running Fox was to return up river, but a guide had been found to conduct the boys as far as Fort Yukon. Gerry was now well enough to manage his craft alone. It would take them about four days and promised to be a monotonous trip, lacking all spice of adventure or accident. Just steady going down the broad, sluggish stream.

The morning broke gold and blue, but not more blue than Tamia's eyes. She had tied a silk handkerchief around her curls and another around her neck, and she was chaperoned by the whole post who had come to the shore to say good-by.

As the three bobbing bark canoes paddled in a line away from the dock, the girl called loudly:

"You'd better go on to England, Kak. It's a great chance."

The Eskimo smiled. The more she wanted him to go the more he felt determined to remain. But he wasn't going to shout that out loud.

"Kanik hasn't thanked you enough for saving his life. We'll be back some time," he answered.

Like an invisible link—a silver thread of sound—his promise came over the water to her:

"We'll be back—some time."

JAMES
DAUGHERTY

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